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SUBALTERN STUDIES : A NEW TREND IN HISTORY WRITING

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Introduction

History writing is an important process. 'Subaltran studies' is a new trend of writing history, like other trends i.e. Imperialism, Premitivism, Nationalism, Marxism, Neo-Marxism, Feminism, Ambedkarism. The need of rewriting and revolution on the basis of narration of history is being expressed.

Objectives

1. Explain the meaning and nature of the Subaltran History. 2. A study of rise of the Subaltran History writing. 3. A study of available sources for the Subaltran History Writing. 4. The survey of early contribution of Subaltran History writing in the India.

Meaning of the Subaltran Studies : 'Subaltran Studies' is known as 'History from below'. Different kinds of synonyms are used for the word 'Subaltran', like : common people, lower class, underprivileged, exploited, inferiors minors, weak etc. British Historian, E.P. Thomson wrote on article in 'The Times Magazine'. While giving his opinion he used the words 'History from Down Below'¹ Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramshi has used the word 'subaltran' for minor, 'poor' downtrodden people.² Subaltran means overlooked, neglected, disregarded, treated with unconcern and indifference.³

Nature of the Subaltran Studies :- In the thousands years of history-writing it is clearly seen that there existed two kinds of people : Superiors and inferiors in the society. The superiors have been given more importance. Therefore, it is expected in Subaltran studies to write the history again, making it free. The inclusion of lower people or com-

mon men's history has been agreed. This trend of writing consists of the agony of exploited workers, labours, oppressed caste, women's income beyond the world of thoughts.⁴ The consciousness and autonomy of lower class regarding consciousness is the foundation of Subaltran studies.⁵

"In the work of subaltran studies it necessary to reach upto not only the ideological part but also the livelihood of common people i.e. poor farmers, shepherds, workers, labours, oppressed caste women.⁶ They are also human beings, they also think, take decisions, decide the way to live and grow in the society. On the basis of this lower people's consciousness, not giving a self-dependent form is to write a never before history of the society or nation. In Subaltran studies it is expected to include the farmers, workers as well as the puppets, in the hands of national leaders, or the people who die without food. The study of all these lower class people is expected in Subaltran studies.⁷ Thus, we can imagine subtal nature of subaltran studies.

Rise of the Subaltran History Writing :-

'Subaltran studies' is a foreign trend of thoughts and the philosophical foundation of this trend is found in the writing of the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramchi.⁸ His thoughts were upheld by many thinkers Frants Cannan, Jivche Zanax, Eric, Hobbs Bon George Rud, Shiro Brizand can be specially mentioned. Antonio Gramchi the founder of Marxist party in Italian tradition and famous as a Marxist thinker. He was the organizer and leader of peasant revolt in Italy after the first world war. He wrote many studies articles after the rise of Mussolini to attack the dictatorship government and asserted the need to organize for changing Mussolini's govern-

ment.⁹ As a result he was arrested in 1926. During his stay in prison he discussed with the prisoners on the political condition and collected information maintaining the daily record. He died in the prison itself. Later on his writing was published under the titles “Selections from Political Writings” and “Selections from Prison Notebooks.” Gramsci tried to give the meaning of Marxist theory regarding the changed condition of world. “The process of production is the foundation of social development and change, economical transactions determine the direction of social development, thoughts and culture.” Gramsci makes argument regarding this theory of Marx and says, “Though economical transaction is the foundation of social life the cultural building on it is of the same importance. Social change gives speed and direction to culture”.¹⁰ Again Gramsci says, ‘Be an Integral Historian and Join the ranks of organic intellectuals in recognising every trace of independent initiative on the part of the Subaltern group, rather than reproducing. The minds and analysing the actions of the dominant group.’¹¹ Through the thoughts of Gramsci, the trend of Subaltern studies became conventional.

Writing of the Subaltern studies and sources

:- The sources of subaltern studies, the social group on which the history has to be written, are not available in large quantity because these groups at the low level of society is not capable of expressing their thoughts and opinions like the superior or leading people. Therefore the literature expressing their revolution is not made we don't have documents and sources of written correspondence. Therefore, Governmental documents, Govt. Reports, Reports of Revenue department, Census report, Documents of Police Department, Judicial Documents, Folktales, Folksongs, Folk-recollection, Interviews etc. are used to write Subaltern studies.¹² The meditation and thinking about all the above sources as well as the help of the different branches of knowledge like Economics, Sociology, Census, Anthropology, Archaeology, Psychology, Linguistics etc. is necessary only then can be created Subaltern history.

Subaltern Studies and India : The trend of ‘Subaltern studies’ prevailed in India, in the last twenty years of the 20th century.¹³ This new trend

gave a way to new challenges by crossing the traditional writing of history. It provided a new direction, new amplitude and helped to begin a new chapter. Indian point of view of Subaltern history is similar to the trend of writing in England, which became famous as ‘History from Below’. The ‘Centre of South Asian Cultural studies’ was established with the assumption that without knowing the work of downtrodden people. It is not possible to obtain the true sight of the contemporary history. Dr. Ranjeet Guha played a vital role in the establishment of this institute. He discussed about this view point of history with some of the Indian scholars. The historians, who experienced the need to study the new point of view regarding the revolt movement during the British rule in India, came together and deliberately started new experiments in the field of history. In 1982, a collection of articles edited by Dr. Guha “Subaltern studies” was published.¹⁴ This first issue of Subaltern studies can be called a concrete invention of the new trend of thoughts.

The philosophical base (foundation) of Dr. Guha’s ‘Subaltern studies’ is found in the writing of Gramsci. Later on, eight issues of ‘Subaltern studies’ were published. Through these issues he gave an outline of common people’s history. He also wrote “Elementary Aspects of Peasant Emergency in Colonial India” In this book he wrote about the main parts of peasant’s revolt “A farmer is the creator of his own history”, says Dr. Guha.¹⁵ Dr. Shahid Amin, a close associate of Dr. Guha, has important contribution in the writing of ‘Subaltern studies’. He was the founder ; editor and worked as teacher in history in Delhi University. He has analysed the effect of Mahatma Gandhi on the minds of the farmers who participated in non-cooperation movement. He has tried to know the intension of different elements of society related to “Chauri-Chowra” incident. He wrote an article ‘Making the Nation Habitable’ and a book, ‘Remembering the Mussalmans.’¹⁶ He has expressed his thoughts about the dangers and bad effects on history writing from the point of view of any religious group.

In the trend of ‘Subaltern studies’ Dr. Sumit Sarkar also has contributed a lot. He is known as a brilliant historian. He studied Marxism and his im-

portant writings consist of the history of common people in national movement, History of Neglected group, Leadership of Mahatma Gandhi in National movement and the dominant nature of foreign colonial government. In 1977 he discussed with Dr. Ranjeet Guha and turned towards this new trend. He wrote book like : Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1973), Popular Movements and Middle Class Leadership in the late Colonial India, Perspectives and problems of History from Below (1985), Writing Social History, Modern India 1885-1947. (1983, 1985). He wrote articles as, Limits of Nationalism, Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltern studies, Beyond Nationalist frame.

Dr. Sumit Sarkar is closer to the concept of 'History from Below' by Edward Thomson. In the introduction to his book. 'Popular Movements and Middle Class Leadership' he says - "History from Below being by concentrating on local and regional developments, encompassing various groups in the word popular-tribal, Peasant, artisan, labour protests and in the middle class a class which started asserting some kind of regional on national leadership and which had a totally different composition from Princes and Zamindars."¹⁷

Dr. Sumit Sarkar has expressed meditative thoughts about Subaltern studies. He says 'Subaltern studies with its critique of all verities of elitism, whether colonist, nationalist or even Marxist has its focus on lower class initiatives its pioneering efforts do represent a major break through in our history writing'.¹⁸ He does not neglect the leader-

ship of organic group of middle class as insignificant. Regarding this he says - "In the anti-imperialist struggle there are two levels - relatively elite and more popular level...it is through the complex Interaction of these levels that there emerged ultimately the pattern continuity through change that I consider dominant for this period."¹⁹ Apart from this, in his article 'Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltern studies' he says that while giving emphasis on the psychology and work of deprived group in society, their social history is neglected.

Conclusion :- The History written till now is one-sided, partial and not showing true picture of low level group in society. A group of people is deprived of proper position. A great man or intellectual group can not create history. True history is not of superior group but it is shaped from the group of common people. The credit of a victory in the battle (war) is not only that of the king or the leader of soldiers but also of the soldiers fighting on the battle field and food suppliers have lion's share in it. If caves, buildings, forts are created in the period of a king, its credit should not go to the only king, but to the mason, water man, artists, labours. All the events and incidents should be recorded in history like this. In the History very much contribution of low level group's work. But till now, they are considered 'common' and not recorded in history. This work brings together all the historians through the new trend of writing 'Subaltern studies', so that the recipients of success should get justice and in the same way true history will be written.

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