

## BOOK REVIEW

SUBALTERNITY, EXCLUSION AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN INDIA by Ashok K. Pankaj and Ajit K. Pandey (eds.), New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2014, xii+375pp. Price Rs. 895, ISBN 978-93-82993-24-7.

Ever since the pioneering approach of Subaltern Studies advanced by Ranajit Guha (in 1982), the studies of subalterns and subalternity have acquired a great deal of attention among historians and social scientists. The advocates of Dalit identity have used theoretical insights of the Subaltern historiography to understand the dynamic role of the underprivileged groups ranking low in social hierarchy consisting of low castes, women, tribes, minorities and the economically backward classes including the marginal peasants. They (subalterns) were the ones who suffered discrimination in social field, exploitation in the economic domain, and oppressions in political field. They have suffered from multiple layers of deprivation. The present book edited by Ashok Pankaj and Ajit Pandey provides a refreshingly new discourse by incorporating the perspectives of subaltern approach with exclusion and social change in an integrated manner. Their meticulous work has analysed multiple dimensions of subalternity and have given a neat theoretical focus in the present volume by underlining the issue of subaltern reproduction.

The book starts with a comprehensive introduction by the editors who take up the issues of Subalternity, Exclusion and Social Change in India, and raise methodological issues and theoretical concerns duly substantiated by empirical data related to social and structural changes in an integrated manner. The dynamic nature of subalternity and social exclusion in India has been explained in the historical perspective and contextualized in contemporary scenario. How democracy and electoral politics provided avenues of mobilization to Backward Castes and in more recent times Dalits to mark their political ascendancy in the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, M.P., Bihar and U.P. has been underlined to give contemporary meaning to the subaltern mobilization. The editors point out that subalternity, exclusion and social change must be studied (p-4) simultaneously with the process of inclusion, assertion and mobilization. Thus the editors have emphasized the need for an integrated approach to the understanding of the three concepts.

The Introduction of the book is quite comprehensive and raises several methodological, ideological and theoretical issues in an inter-related manner covering a wide canvas of discussion and debate concerning Indian society in contemporary times. The articles in this volume capture the ideology, knowledge and power as forces of subaltern reproduction in Indian Society. It also tries to capture the dominant impulse of emancipation and assertion adopted by different groups triggering change in social structure and cultural traditions.

Apart from the Introduction, the book has five sections. The second and the third section consist of six papers in all dealing with various aspects of subaltern studies. Traversing through the Marxism and the neo-structural ideas of social scientists, K L Sharma reviews the debate on subaltern studies and considers it a new enchanting paradigm in social science. Endorsing the narratives of Subaltern Studies, Dipankar Gupta treats the approach of subaltern historians critically for the use of anthropological method for history writing. The paper by

Sreedhara in this section highlights the importance of human rights violation especially related to Dalits for subaltern studies and its ignorance by the contributors of Subaltern Studies. He considers domination-subordination and autonomous subaltern consciousness as an important feature of the subaltern perspective. Addressing the challenge from a human right perspective seems quite apt. By bringing the issue of human rights, he has tried to enlarge the scope of subaltern studies.

The third section of the volume deals with the issue of subaltern reproduction through idea, knowledge and power. It consists of three articles. The first article by Ashok Pankaj alludes to the vocabulary of political discourse which provides a new meaning when he forcefully brings into focus the relevance of the approach from the political economy perspective. He reiterates dialectics of discourse tracing the socio-political assertion of Dalit and Backward Classes as thesis and the vocabulary of political discourse as its anti-thesis. However, one may find it somewhat contentious to accept market economy dominating the outcome of Dalit and backward class assertion as synthesis. Yet, it is true that the new political dispensation has allowed market forces to gain predominance over the welfare expectancy of the state. The article of Nita Kumar adds a new dimension wherein she examines the role of education from colonial times to post colonial times. In the context of subalternity, she has examined educational subalternity and analysed the role of state, missionary education, indigenous education, nationalist education and post colonial education in this respect.

Section four of the volume consists of three articles. The first by Rao examines the contours of Dalit movement in South Indian context. In the context of Dalit movement in Andhra Pradesh, one often finds intra-group conflicts and divisive policies of the state weakening the autonomous character of Dalit's movement. Barrett has also examined the paradox and contradictions of the policies of inclusion. It is a sharp pointer to the fact that the subalternity consists of multivariate aspects of the society and culture. The third article by Galab and Revathie is the sharp pointer to the fact of bringing out different elements of women subalternity. They argue that that increasing women's participation in agriculture may turn out to be a potential weapon to combat subalternity. Their argument is based on empirical study in three states of Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal that has explored the interface between women's access to land, participation in agriculture and ownership of land. The share of women as farmers has increased from 42% in 2004-05 to 52% in 2009-10 (as suggested by NSSO 2010), thereby fostering feminization of agriculture. This fact has been highlighted forcefully with substantial evidence from the field data.

Section five of the volume deals with the issue of social and cultural changes. It has five articles dealing with religious and socio-cultural issues depicting the diverse features of Indian society. Madan's article deals with features of Hindu religion. He considers it to be rooted in the spiritual values, and therefore, dismisses religious resurgence not espousing its universal character as it is made out to be in contemporary times. Jha and Singh contest the exclusivist image of Hinduism. They point out that the ethos of tolerance and pluralism has been its salient character, and therefore, end up suggesting inclusivist construction of Hinduism. In separate articles, Rodgers and Sharma deal with caste and class issue to highlight its dynamic character. Rodgers points out the caste and class hierarchies causing contradictions in Bihar where semi-feudal relations as pointed out by the noted economist Pradhan H. Prasad holds the vital component of its social structure. The survey data collected over three decades in villages of Bihar provide dynamic features of caste, class and land and based on the empirical data, the author sees signs of substantive decline in semi-feudal mode of production. Sharma's article on

caste-class nexus provides a review of sociological studies having significant contribution for the understanding of social stratification. Madhu Nagla's article dealing with *Khap panchayat*, honour killing and gender relations provide a useful discourse in understanding how patriarchy still occupies and constrains the thinking of the collective mindset. The gender relations in rural society of Haryana still remain largely unchanged despite rapid change in the economic field.

On the whole the editors deserve appreciation for providing a new light in understanding the complex issues of subalternity, exclusion and social change and their interrelations from political economy perspective. The articles included in the volume are full of theoretical insights and empirical evidences. The book deserves to be read by all those who aspire for having fresh insights on issues of subalternity exclusion and social change in Indian society.

Department of Sociology  
Maharshi Dayanand University  
Rohtak, Haryana-124001

**Jitendra Prasad**