



Book Review

Silent Screams and the Plight of the Marginalised: A Review of Dipak Giri's *Subaltern Perspectives in Indian Context*

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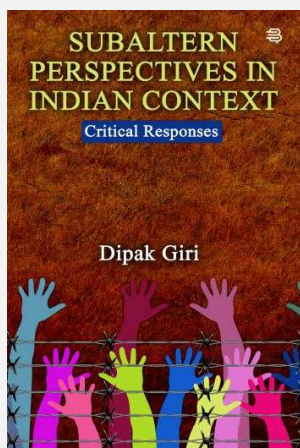
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*Subaltern Perspectives in Indian Context: Critical
Responses*

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“Let literature teach us that there are no certainties, that the process is open, and that it may be altogether salutary that it is so.”

— Gayatri Chakroborty Spivak in *Death of the Disciple*

True to Spivak’s opinion as quoted above, Dipak Giri’s *Subaltern Perspectives in Indian Context: Critical Responses* seeks inclusivity by drawing all the marginalised groups of people in India. The book gives space to Dalits, Tribes, women, workers, peasants, labourers, and people of many other voiceless communities. The book comprises twenty-three chapters written by scholars and academics from various parts of India and, most importantly, includes an interview conducted by the editor with the Saraswati Samman awardee, popular Dalit writer Sharankumar Limbale. The organization of the chapters is elaborate and methodical, revealing both thematic coherence and diversity in methodological approaches, thereby allowing readers to engage with subalternity from a multiplicity of critical perspectives.

The first chapter, “Arupa Patangia Kalita’s *Felanee*: The Tenacity of the Voiceless,” by Anmona Bora, foregrounds ethnic violence in Assam and offers a meticulous analysis of the novel *Felanee*. Bora examines the life of Felanee, a woman doubly colonized by socio-political structures and patriarchal norms, and presents a historiographical critique that situates the novel within real-life socio-political events. The analysis highlights the interplay between literature and history, demonstrating how fiction can serve as a lens for understanding marginalized experiences and historiography.

Following this, Aswathy Mohan’s chapter, “Epiphany at the Heart of Silence: Amitav Ghosh’s Rediscovery of the Subaltern Voice,” engages critically with four of Amitav Ghosh’s novels, *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide*, *The Circle of Reason*, and *Sea of Poppies*, to explore the dynamics of marginalization. Mohan’s research identifies a recurring narrative pattern wherein protagonists attempt to move from the margins to the centre of societal recognition but are often relegated back to the peripheries due to structural and identity-based constraints. The chapter insightfully asserts, “In addressing the challenges the subaltern face in recovering and representing themselves in stories, Ghosh tries to coalesce the encumbrances and the issues that gag them” (Giri 25), thereby highlighting the structural challenges faced by subaltern characters and, by extension, real-life marginalized groups.

Dr. Nitasha Baloria’s contribution emphasizes the subtle forms of subalternity that persist even within ostensibly privileged settings. Her chapter on Shashi Deshpande’s *That Long Silence* examines the societal mechanisms that condition women’s behaviour, compelling them to adopt silence as a strategic survival response. Baloria demonstrates how literature can render visible the nuances of oppression, particularly the internalized subalternity imposed upon women through societal norms and familial expectations. Complementing this, Dr. Sanobar Kahkeshan’s “Depiction of Subaltern Theme in Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*” and Anamitra Chatterjee’s “Perspectives on Marginalisation in Literature and Cinema in Reference to Mulk Raj Anand’s Select Novels and Ashutosh Gawarikar’s Film *Lagaan*” further explore literary and cinematic representations of marginalization, underscoring the interplay between socio-political structures and creative narratives.

Several chapters in this volume expand the study of subalternity to diverse literary and cinematic texts. Saptarshi Sengupta and Dr. Mohammad Nazrul Bari’s “Marginalised Fragments

of Colonial Bengal through Subaltern Perspectives” investigates subaltern experiences during colonial Bengal. In contrast, Tania Baloria’s “Vocalising Marginalised: A Perspective from Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*” examines not only the positionality of marginalized individuals in Ayemenem but also their capacity for vocalisation within a semi-autobiographical framework. Baloria’s analysis illuminates the ways in which Roy negotiates personal and collective histories, highlighting the intersection of lived experience and narrative agency.

The anthology also emphasizes cinema as a medium for subaltern representation. Harish Mangalam’s “Dalit Films and Commitment” traces the trajectory of Dalit cinema, particularly in Maharashtra, demonstrating how filmmakers and writers have historically foregrounded the concerns of marginalized communities. Mangalam’s analysis includes the Gujarati film *Tame Keva*, interpreting the symbolic resonance of character names such as Ramji, which evokes Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a seminal figure in Dalit emancipation. He notes, “In this film, the protagonist Ramji fights against urban casteism with full commitment” (Giri 96), illustrating the power of cinematic narrative in engaging with issues of caste-based oppression.

Similarly, Dr. Debarati Nandy’s “Prospect of Tribal Art Market in India: A Brief Scenario” examines subalternity through the lens of market structures, employing a Marxist perspective to interrogate the intersections of caste, class, and economic exploitation. By analyzing the commercialisation of tribal art, Nandy demonstrates how systemic subjugation operates through material and economic mechanisms, providing a nuanced understanding of marginalization beyond textual representation. Dr. Andrey Shastri and Raghavendra Garai offer complementary examinations of Dalit subalternity, focusing on the socio-political and literary representation of marginalized communities. Garai, in particular, observes, “The approach of their writings is the gush of inspiration that helps to understand the history of untouchables, ... To present themselves properly in this society, their writings reveal a clear consciousness of Dalits or Untouchables’ struggle with metaphorical contiguity” (Giri 154-55), thereby highlighting the literary articulation of subaltern consciousness.

The anthology further addresses themes of germination and historiography in the subaltern discourse. Priya Ghosh’s “Sad State of Subaltern: The Root Cause for Its Germination” and Saleha Ilhaam’s “Revisiting, Reflecting and Relocating the Subaltern and Subaltern Historiography” interrogate the origins, persistence, and reinterpretation of subaltern positions, emphasizing the relevance of historical consciousness in understanding contemporary marginalization. Injela Zaini’s “The Subaltern Can Speak: Manto as the ‘Crusader’ of the Marginalised Women” provides a compelling case study of literary subalternity, highlighting Manto’s engagement with women in prostitution — a group systematically excluded from social recognition. Zaini asserts, “The rebellious, intelligent and genuine women characters of Manto manage to create quite a ruckus in the subaltern space by breaking all known stereotypes and pre-conceived notion” (Giri 179), underscoring the transformative potential of literature in challenging entrenched social hierarchies.

The volume extends its focus to the subalternity of other marginalized communities. Nitish Gogoi’s “Migrant Coolies in Assam’s Tea Gardens: Migration History, Colonial Exploitation, Control of Labour and the Making of Coolie Line in Assam” explores the historical and structural conditions affecting labourers in Assam’s tea gardens. Similarly, Arindam Mukherjee’s “Barriers to the Spread of Education among Muslim Women” examines the intersection of religious practice and gendered subalternity, highlighting the socio-cultural

impediments to education. Kishalaya Podder's "Position of Women in Colonial Bengal: A Discussion of Short Stories of Rabindranath Tagore from Subaltern Perspectives" and Sagar Rakshit's chapter on Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* critically interrogate women's subalternity through literary texts, emphasizing the enduring effects of double colonization and structural marginalization. SK Saiful Rehaman's "A Study of Female Subaltern in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*" further foregrounds women's lived experiences, blending textual analysis with socio-historical context to illuminate the nuanced realities of subaltern existence.

The anthology also addresses subalternity in agrarian communities. Sindhura Dutta's "Can Peasants Speak?: The Bengal Famine in 1943 and its Depiction through Illustrations by Chittaprosad Bhattacharya" creatively engages with Spivak's seminal question, analyzing the lived experiences of peasants during colonial rule and their exclusion from structures of power (Giri 242). Biplob Ghosh's "Diversity of Farmers Movement in India and a New Light" situates these communities within the broader trajectory of agrarian activism, examining movements during the 1970s and post-Green Revolution era. Ghosh's quantitative analysis demonstrates how systemic economic pressures — such as price fluctuations and indebtedness — have contributed to the persistent marginalization of farmers, concluding, "In many cases they are suffering due to price increases and the decline in prices of the produce crops and they are falling at the council of loans they have taken and are opting for suicide. Still, no peasant movement took place in an organized manner against these injustices" (Giri 284).

Finally, Dr. Dipak Giri concludes the volume with an incisive interview with Dalit writer Sharankumar Limbale, examining the broader implications of Dalit subalternity and situating Limbale's literary oeuvre within the subaltern framework. This concluding chapter reinforces the significance of dialogue and intellectual engagement in understanding the complexities of marginalized identities.

In conclusion, *Subaltern Perspectives in Indian Context: Critical Responses* is a comprehensive and meticulously curated anthology that interrogates the dynamics of marginalization across multiple axes, including caste, gender, class, ethnicity, and profession. By incorporating fiction, non-fiction, cinema, and art, the volume illuminates the multidimensionality of subalternity and underscores its dynamic, non-static nature. Each chapter contributes a distinct analytical perspective, collectively offering a profound engagement with subaltern theory and praxis. Giri's editorial vision, culminating in his dialogue with Sharankumar Limbale, affirms the contemporary relevance of subaltern discourse in India and beyond, while simultaneously demonstrating literature's capacity to unsettle certainties and amplify marginalized voices. This anthology is an indispensable resource for scholars, students, and readers invested in literary studies, cultural analysis, and social justice, providing a comprehensive framework for the ongoing exploration of subaltern identities.