



LITERATURES IN ENGLISH

Theories and Practices

(Vol. II)



Mr. Bibhishan Phad

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Edited by

Mr. Bibhishan Phad



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A Critique of Subaltern Theory

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Subaltern is the word derived from Latin it means of lower status, 'sub' as next below, alternus' as every other. The concise Oxford English dictionary and the Cambridge Advanced Learner's dictionary give the meaning of the term as an army officer whose rank is lower than captain. The Wikipedia an online encyclopedia gives two types of definition of the term,

1. Subaltern is a term that commonly refers to persons who are socially, politically and geographically outside of hegemonic power structure.
2. The term subaltern is used in postcolonial theory. The meaning of the term in current philosophical and critical usage is disputed. Subaltern is the term used in general sense to refer to marginalised groups and the lower classes in society. A subaltern is someone with low rank in social, political or other hierarchy. It can also mean someone who has been marginalised or oppressed.

The term 'Subaltern' was first elaborated by Italian, Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci. According to Gramsci the term refers to the groups who are outside of the established structures of political representation. The term subaltern has close association with Marxism, Post-Structuralism and Post-Colonial Criticism. Subaltern studies have great relevance to understand and interpret the contemporary society and history. Antonio Gramsci has used the term as subordinate position in terms of class, gender, race and culture.

The term subaltern was popularized by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has made emphasis on the structure of colonialism, the Feminist movement and Marxism. 'Can the subaltern speak?' is her influential essay later on expanded in her book 'Critique of Post-Colonial Reason' (1999). Her essay has played a pivotal



Mr. Bibhishan Phad has been teaching English language and literature for last 11 years. He is an Assistant Professor and Head of the Department of English in Kholeshwar Mahavidyalaya, Ambajogai. He has published various research articles in national and international journals and books and has presented research papers in various state, national and international conferences. He is interested in British, Indian literature and English Language Teaching.

