

### ***Book Review***

***Subalternity, Exclusion and Social Change in India***, edited by Ashok K.

Pankaj and Ajit K. Pandey, New Delhi, Foundation Books, 2014, xii + 371 pp.,

ISBN 978-93-82993-24-7

In the book under review, the editors Ashok K. Pankaj and Ajit K. Pandey provide an excellent and significant standpoint on the issues of subalternity reproduction, social exclusion, and changes in contemporary India. The editors argue that their aim is to confine the processes that ‘reproduce subalterns and subalternity’ (vii) and to carry out an ‘analysis of the forces of social and cultural changes’ (vii). To address such a feature of Indian society, the editors espouse an ‘integrative approach’ (7) to comprehend the notion of subalternity, exclusion, and social change in Indian society.

The book is divided into five sections and each section is made up of various chapters. In the first chapter, ‘Understanding Subalternity, Exclusion and Social Change in India’, Ashok Pankaj and Ajit Pandey illustrate the problems associated with subaltern studies and they argue that ‘subaltern studies was more concerned with the historiography of the nation’ (12) and thus disregarded the socio-economic origins of subalternity.

In chapter 2, 'Revisiting Subaltern Studies in India', K. L. Sharma provides a historical overview of subaltern studies and critiques subaltern studies by stating that 'this produce[s] ethnocentric historicism'(51). Dipankar Gupta, in his chapter 'On Altering the Ego in Peasant History', welcomes the move of subaltern studies as it uses anthropological sources for writing the history of the oppressed people, but criticises the methodology of describing the past. V. S. Sreedhara, in his chapter 'Human Rights, Dalit Questions and Subaltern Studies in India', discusses 'the discourse on subaltern studies with reference to human rights question in India' (77). He argues that subaltern historians failed to understand the perspective of human rights violation of Dalit peoples at large.

Ashok K. Pankaj explains the forces of subaltern reproduction. He argues that a new political economy is intrinsically biased against the interests of Dalit and Backward Classes and reproduces subalternism. Madhav Govind, in 'Modern Science and Indigenous Techniques', empirically investigates how subaltern knowledge production in India is conclusively subjugated and marginalised. He claims that Brahminical control over Hindu religious literature and later colonial rule created great obstacle in producing subaltern knowledge. Education, indeed as an extra-important source of subaltern reproduction in India, has been discussed by Nita Kumar in her chapter 'The Construction of the Subaltern through Education'. She argues that both colonial and post-colonial

nationalist education have helped produce and reproduce subaltern classes in India.

Yagati Chinna Rao, in his chapter, 'Contours of Dalit Movement in South India', describes the history of Dalit movement in South India. He argues that 'Dalit movement in India is an ideological movement for establishing an egalitarian social order' (173). Rajan Joseph Barrett, in his chapter, 'Subalternity and the Mirage of Social Inclusion', elucidates the irony and inconsistency of the project of inclusion by analysing a Dalit narrative '*Karukku*', the autobiography of *Bama. Bama*, despite being a Dalit Christian, is subjugated and could not acquire a space in mainstream society. Thus the author argues that the notion that religion conversion of subaltern community is nothing but a mirage. S. Galab and E. Revathi have talked about the nexus between access to agriculture and the status of women. They argue that 'women's participation in agriculture can increase efficiency and productivity if they are simultaneously given title to the land' (246).

Section 5 is composed of five chapters covering the various aspects of social change with reference to social institutions. T. N. Madan discusses 'the persistence of religion in our time and the significance of the same from a rationalist perspective' (30). Gerry Roddgers, with the help of longitudinal data, explores the shifting role of caste and class in Bihar's rural economy. The significance of caste and class nexus 'as an approach to the study of social

stratification in India' (338) has been espoused by K. L. Sharma in his chapter too. Madhu Nagla explains how the *khap panchayet* as an old patriarchal institution is struggling to retain its existence 'amidst its declining social role and emergence of modern institution' (355).

The Subaltern study approach by Ranjit Guha and his followers has come under criticism since its inception by many scholars. This book is not exactly a critique of the Subaltern group; instead, the authors have consciously tried to encounter how the subaltern originated and has been excluded in Indian society. In doing so the book under review has made an important contribution to studies on the subaltern. It fascinatingly addresses issues on subaltern and social change in India. It is an important source for those interested in the study of subaltern politics, social exclusion, and post-colonialism in India, and highly recommended for the student of Postcolonial history, Indian Politics and Sociology of India. This volume will provide a new way to study how the subaltern is produced and reproduced in India.