

## Oral Traditions: As A Source Material For Subaltern Studies

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### Abstract:

In recent year several new trends emerged in the Indian historical writings. Most of the earlier works concentrate on political history such as genealogy, chronology rather than their contribution towards society, economy and religion. The colonial and Nationalist historiography greatly utilized the available archaeological and literary sources. Nationalist historiography made a significant contribution in the historical research. But their point of view is different and neglected the non-elite and folks Marxist historiography studied their own point of view and concentrate diverse social-economic productive groups. Even though they also neglected certain lower basic social economic groups such as women, peasants, peasant labours, tribes, Dalits, Advises and basic productive groups subaltern studies are the basic source material for reconstructing the history and culture of the subaltern groups. An attempt is made in this paper how subaltern studies utilize the folk or oral sources in the historical writings.

**Key words:** Folk-lore, subaltern studies, Marxist historiography, Interpretation, Vernacular literature.

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In recent years historical research has moved around the matters of the elites, their politics, diplomatic and palaces. For many decades our historical writings were totally involved to praising very few eminent personalities particularly the ruling class. The common man who participated in productive activities and nation building found no place in historical writings. <sup>(1)</sup> Marxist historiography aimed of socio-economic aspects of encountered the limitations of political history of elitist point of view, started reconstructing history in the perspective of common man, <sup>(2)</sup> Since, the early Marxist historiography emphasis on class struggle and economic aspects. The issues and identities of down trodden, tribals, peasants and women were neglected. <sup>(3)</sup>

By questioning the gaps in socio-economic historiography of the Marxist scholars the new trend called subaltern studies was initiated in 1982. The term 'subaltern' was first coined by the Italian Marxist Philosopher Antonio Gramsci in his popular work "The Prison Diary" Oxford dictionary defines "subaltern as inferior rank in terms of caste, class and gender". The other terms like "people, primitive rebels' bondsman and working clans" are being used equivalent to the form subaltern. <sup>(4)</sup> The project entitled subaltern studies writing on south Asian history and society is aimed at reconstructing the past in the perspective of Dalits, Adivasis, Peasants, Women trade unions famines and epidemics <sup>(5)</sup> etc. They deny the dominant paradigm of national leaders like Grandhi and Nehru. They argue that the whole strata and women were totally neglected. <sup>(6)</sup> The main objective of the subaltern studies in de-elilizing history Ranjit Guha, Gyam Pande, David Arnold etc. are the important scholars of the school

The recent subaltern history are following new methods and in searching for the tools and interpretations since the previous historical sources like the inscriptions, literature and monuments were produced and created by the upper strata of the society.

Naturally, they furnish information regarding their patrons and the people around them. Though they are considered as an authentic source material by many historians, they contain very little information regarding the people at lower levels. <sup>(7)</sup>

Telugu literature is said to have started with the advents of Nannaya and his writings. But many scholars in Telugu literature do not accept. This opinion and they say that the above options in partial towards the Brahmanical values. In support of the criticism regarding the advent of Telugu literature majority of our medieval Telugu texts also seems to be translated from the original Sanskrit versions of epics and other classical works. <sup>(8)</sup> But still the versions of the *Ramayana, the Mahabharatha and the Sarangadhara Charitra, Sriganagara Sakuntalam etc.*, are being considered as the greatest creative works in Telugu literature. <sup>(9)</sup> Most of these works are limited to romanticize the facts and there is no scope for discussing the issue of the ordinary folk. In these circumstances, folk-lore and sources found place in reconstructing the peoples' history and their culture. <sup>(10)</sup>

Folk-lore consists of folk songs folk-tales, proverbs, dance verbal and art forms, Kulapuranas their customs, traditions, implements food habits, folk medicine, village deities and their Jatharas etc. All these forms were created by the persons of non-literary societies at rural and low origin. Hence, one can say that they reveal the true socio-cultural history of the existing society with flesh and blood, since there are no learned people in these societies all these sources provided by them are in oral form and have been flowing on the tongues of the people through the ages. Though no one known the original creators of these folk-lore and various verbal are forms the information provided by them are valuable and bringing the unknown issues which were kept in the darkest corners into knows. <sup>(11)</sup>

Folk songs not only provide recreation for the people and reduce the burden of work, but they furnish valuable information about the common people in rural areas work songs and pastoral songs reveal the nature of work and the circumstances of the workers of their work place. Folk tales narratives contain the direct information regarding various historical events. The Stories of many subaltern herbs were brought to light though these oral narratives from the popular memory. At the global level Flex Holy's popular novel "The Roots" on historical background of the blacks i.e., the predecessors of the author wars reconstructed beautifully on the basis of oral narrative, provided by certain generations of people like wise there are many events came to light through these sources of local level. The history of the Gond here Komaram Bheem and his fight against the oppressive measures of the Nizam and the role played by the ordinary women in Telangana armed struggle were brought in focus through the narratives only. <sup>(12)</sup>

Another interesting source material is provided by the Kulapuranas or the caste system, caste myths regarding the origin of various communities and their ancestors. Generally, these Kulapuranas are said to be explained by persons of dependent castes of the major caste groups as the major caste groups like the Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vysya and the Sudra i.e. the Reddy, Kamma and Kapu are having the bards to explain the stories of their communities, the lower social groups like Mala, Madiga, Yadava, Chakali, Mangali, Koya, Lambad, Gond etc. also have the dependent castes to explain the back ground of their origin. <sup>(13)</sup>

Generally, the Kulapuranas of the lower caste groups propagate the self – respect of their groups in the process of their narratives. The bards from the communities of Dukkali, Chendu, Mala, Masti etc. explain the previous situation of those people as equal to that of the other communities and criticize social inequality. They oppose the so called Brahmanical versions of the epics and the Puranas. Their art forms like Jamba Puranam, Mala Puranams, Chindu bhagavatam et. Give an alternative versions of the prevailed Sanskrit versions. <sup>(14)</sup>

Proverbs, the other forms of the folk lore also furnish us information regarding the issues of caste proverbs indicate the social status of various communities. They often degrade the down trodden communities and praised privileged classes of the society. <sup>(15)</sup>

Besides the folk tales, songs, kulapuranas and proverbs various practices of the villagers, their customs, traditions, village deities and fairs and festivals reveal the existing social situation. The village Jataras to various local goddess like <sup>(16)</sup> Ellamma, Pochamma, Maremma, Gangamma, Sunkamma etc., shows us the alternative and non-sanskrit modes of worship offered by them. And the role of various communities in these contexts also indicates the existing social order and belief system. Generally people from lower communities in the villages only participate in these festivals at large number and they do not practice the Brahmanical methods like chanting the slokas during these occasions. Since many of the goddesses are related to the nature they never attribute any supernatural merits to those goddesses and construct certain huge temples and Gopurams for worship. <sup>(17)</sup>

The folk-lore on the oral source from the popular memory give us a ray of hope to understand and reconstruct the history of the down trodden which has been buried and unsung for the ages since, the chronology occupies an important place in historical writing. The Questions arises in the minds of the recent historians who are very much curious about folk-lore/ oral sources whether those alternative sources are sufficient for their analysis. Because even though the folk-lore or oral histories provide us vague dates to certain events in history

which are not suitable when compared with other sources. Hence, the historian of the recent days who would like to reconstruct the subaltern history of history from below requires to supplement, vernacular literature, kaifiyas and other archaeological data. Then only the actual picture of history and culture of the people will come to light.<sup>(18)</sup>

S.No.	Dependent	Person Caste	Details of Kulapuranas
1	Beeramalavaru	Kurma	Mallanna kotha oggu katha
2	Mandalolu	Yadava	Katham Raju Katha, Yadava Puranam, Bhagavatha Katha
3	Gollabhadragavathulu	Yadava	Bhagavatha Katha
4	Chindu	Madiga	Jamba Purana
5	Dekkali	Madiga	Jamba Purana
6	Bindla Bavani	Mala	Jangama Katha
7	Mala Jangalu	Mangali	
8	Gurramvaru	Mangali	Malakula Puranam
9	Addamvaru	Mangali	Nayibrahmana Puranam
10	Pekkantivaru	Kummari	Shalivahana Puranam
11	Ganjikutivari	Chakali	Rajaka Puram Basava Puram Maddu Puranam
12	Ghoudajetti	Goundiga	Kaundiya Purana
13	Kaki Padagalivaru	Mudiraj	Mahabharatha Katha
14	Doli	Koya	Koya Kulapuranam
15	Thoti / Pradhan	Gond	Gond Mythology
16	Bhats	Lambada	Bhat Katha
17	Tenugu masti	Tenugu Kapu / Telaga	Masti Katha

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