

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES

BHARATHIAR UNIVERSITY, COIMBATORE - 46

*TWO DAY UGC SPONSORED INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
"SUBALTERN STUDIES AND MINORITY LITERATURE"*

INAUGURAL FUNCTION

Date: 30th March, 2016

Time: 10.00 am – 11.30 am

Venue: ThanthaiPeriyar Auditorium

Prayer Song	:	Tamil Thai Vazhthu
Lighting the Lamp	:	
Welcome Address	:	Dr.R.SARAVANA SELVAN Professor & Head
Introducing the Theme of the Conference	:	Dr. P. NAGARAJ Assistant Professor
Honouring the Guests	:	
Presidential Address	:	Prof. Dr. A. GANAPATHI Hon'ble Vice Chancellor Chief Patron-ICSML 16 Bharathiar University Coimbatore - 46
Releasing the Conference Proceedings	:	
Inaugural Address	:	Prof. Dr. A.L. KATONIS University of Thessaloniki, Greece
Keynote Address	:	Prof. Dr. EDWIN ZAPPE Muisches School of Arts, Austria
Vote of Thanks	:	Mr. B. PADMANABHAN Assistant Professor

Tea Break : 11.30 am -11.45 am

Minority literature: Into a different insight

Inaugural Address delivered at the International Conference on "Subaltern Studies and Minority Literature" held at Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, South India, on the 30th March, 2016

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Subaltern Studies

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak opened up the doors to Subaltern Studies with her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) in which she proclaimed that "for ... the 'true' subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself".

Subaltern Studies arose as a way of situating historical research so as to minimize the problem of collision of elite and mass. As the name implies, the subjects to be studied are understood by the researcher to be somewhat outside of traditional history. Being outside of traditional history, the researcher can move forward in his or her work unchallenged. It becomes possible to take up quite daring and progressive issues – and this is happening. At the same time there is the risk that by acquiescing to the traditional elite and mass parameters, what an author presents can be made not to "matter". As part of the cultural production of meanings, ethnicity interrogates widespread constructions of reality by pointing to a discontinuous sociopolitical landscape steeped in competing and overlapping cultural ideologies. The identities of minority subjects are composed of multiple and opposed cultural and socio-ideological positions. Ethnic subjects are comprised by cultural over-determinations from inside minority communities within the many structures of dominant society and as a result of the interactions between ethnic enclaves and components of the mainstream. Ethnicity is situated in numerous and conflicting social and ideological sites.

Subaltern Texts

The focus on literary texts over social or historical documentation is advantageous on one level. Throughout its intellectual trajectory the 'subaltern' has been hard put to make an empirical case for her putative silence. Don't labourers, peasants, and dalit women speak out? Spivak was repeatedly asked by positivist historians and social scientists. All arguments about 'speaking' as institutional validation, not just physical voice that can be heard, have fallen on deaf ears. The idea of unrecoverable voices and accounted for silences appears to work better in the domain of texts, and especially for those scholars trained in close textual reading. For these latter are much more attuned to the limits of a normative transparency, to analysis that is sensitive to the lack of congruence between production of speech and its reception, between the subject of knowledge and its object.

Discourse of Subalternity

As a postcolonial theoretical practice, the discourse of subalternity has a twofold promise. On the one hand, it is a tool which can responsibly change our vistas on the functionality of colonial processes within our neocolonial realities. On the other, it challenges the foundations of the Western concepts of knowledge and understanding by establishing links between geocultural locations and concepts of theoretical and narrative production. By focusing on these spacial, ideological, and epistemic links, the discourse of subalternity expands its conceptual reach, and assumes a more responsible and realistic turn in its emphasis on the enactment of the enunciation of knowledge - borne through the open realm of historical circumstances and personal sensibilities. In its expansion thus, the discourse of subalternity also displaces the Western loci of knowledge and enunciation. Harvard Professor Homi K. Bhabha celebrates this liberator and deconstructionist discursive practice in *The Location of Culture* thus,

"[D]riven by subaltern history of the margins of modernity - rather than by the failures of logocentrism - I have tried, in some small measure, to revise the known, to rename the postmodern from the position of the postcolonial".

Conclusion

Historians were dividing along schisms in social theory into opposing schools that separated society and culture from state institutions and political economy. Scholars continue to write two kinds of national history: one, people's history filled with native culture and popular insurgency; the other, an official history filled with elites and political parties. Nations and states were separating like oil and water. So were culture and political economy. A new kind of nationality is coalescing in a separate domain of popular experience, which is becoming increasingly isolated from state institutions and national elites.