

ABSTRACT

Postcolonial Capital Accumulation & Unorganised Labour Migration: Resituating Subaltern Theory and the Neo-Subaltern

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This paper basically deals with the issue of primitive accumulation under neo-liberal policy reforms in a postcolonial country like india and its implications for Subaltern Studies. For this, the paper would advance four fold arguments. First it would address the question of primitive accumulation in this neo-liberal conjuncture- its present format and dynamics, its modus operandi of asymmetrical development resulting in the hegemony of the corporate financial elite and the subsequent immiserisation of the peasants and the petty producers, the land grabs and encroachment on the 'new commons'. The blatant disregard of the institutional and legal safeguards in dismantling the tribals from their mineral rich habitat /habitus is another testimony of unabashed postcolonial accumulation of capital. Secondly, it would deal with the new subaltern domains capital accumulation has created in contemporary India. It would take up one such subaltern group - the question of unorganized labour migration as a domain of exclusion/

exploitation in the triumphant march of capital in its vicious logic of accumulation by dispossession, coercion, containment/co-option. The mode of postcolonial development in its neo-liberal avatar has sharply divided the urban and rural India- sometimes referred to as two indias, india of light and India of darkness. While affluent mega cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Bangalore, Chennai, and Nagpur are browbeating for their economic growth, a careful analysis will make it clear that it's the flow of the casual labour from other underdeveloped states of India that functions as the catalyst behind their massive change. West Bengal is one of those states which act as the hub of cheap labour for national and international migration. The rosy picture of migration as an alternative means of development crushes under the clinical analyses of its dynamics. The over increasing number of migrant labourers questions the success of the Government schemes like MGNREGA and the role of the state as the arbiter of 'distributive justice' or social and economic liberty. Workers also meet with unjust economic distribution. Only one group, namely the labour suppliers, is gaining tremendously out of this entire system. The unorganized labourers also suffer from the uncertainty and vulnerability of livelihood and especially from the insecurity of their lives. Sometimes their increased income is reducing poverty but they are lagging behind in terms of all round development. The other part of the story is much more complex and interesting. Due to their long absence, their conjugal and family lives suffer greatly. Their wives always suffer from a sense of insecurity about themselves and their husbands. Their perspective on migration forces us to have an insight for rethinking this phenomenon called migration. This paper would do an ethnographic study of labour migration from select villages of Malda district of west Bengal.

Thirdly, the paper then would critically engage with the theoretical formulations of Kalyan Sanyal and Partha Chatterjee on the 'reversal of primitive accumulation' or its 'effects' via

welfarist governmentality from the vantage point of labour migration. If the re-distributive schemes such as MGNREGA are successful, why then migration continues on such a grand scale? Is the migrant labour a self employed labour? Can it be viewed from the perspective of 'trickle down' theory of neo-liberal development? Or the whole model of postcolonial capital accumulation should be questioned in the face of agrarian crisis which is also the prime reason of labour migration?

Finally, the paper would deal with the new areas of engagement these domains of subordination by Capital have thrown up for Subaltern Studies. In a recent article in EPW, "After Subaltern studies", Partha Chatterjee talked about 'new projects' to address the questions raised by Subaltern Studies which he thinks are still relevant and points out the need of new concepts and methodologies for the 'new times'. However the new areas he locates as possible fields of engagement are engagement with popular culture, history by visual sources such as calendar art, a turn towards ethnography-towards the 'practical, the everyday the local', etc. These proposed sites, though important for their own reason, does not take us beyond the culturalism by which Subaltern Studies has come to be characterized and are inadequate to address the question of the new subalterns of contemporary neo-liberal capital. Taking up the criticisms of Subaltern Studies from various quarters and the recent Chatterjee- Vivek Chibber interface, our argument would be that Subaltern Studies needs to re-engage with the material conditions of subordination of the neo-subalterns of global capital to re-energise the subaltern/democratic politics of counter narrative of resistance, something we seldom can see under neo-liberal postcolonial capitalism.