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**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 capital accumulation under neo-liberal policy reforms in a postcolonial country like India and its implications for Subaltern Studies. For this, the paper would advance a four-fold argument. First, it would address the question of accumulation- both the existing capitalist accumulation by expansion and primitive accumulation in this neo-liberal conjuncture. 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. To substantiate our argument we would do an ethnographic study of labour migration from select villages of Malda district of West Bengal. Thirdly, while dealing with capital accumulation and newer areas of subjugation in neo-liberal times, the paper 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. Finally, the paper would deal with the new areas of engagement these domains of subordination by Capital have thrown up for Subaltern Studies and what future road-maps Subaltern Studies can think about. Taking up the criticisms of Subaltern Studies from various quarters and the recent Partha 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.

The Arrival of Neo-Liberal Capital

Although the demand for reforms was already growing in the 1980s, it is in the 1991, with the union government's decision to open the market that the Indian economy goes global. The various reforms, under the structural adjustments demanded by IMF and the World Bank, had far reaching consequences on the industrial policy, finance flow, tariff deregulation etc. The Indian economy was integrated in the global capitalist order enunciated in the Washington consensus. Let us very briefly rehearse the story here. In industrial policy, the 'license raj' is completely done away with. This with the subsequent amendment in the Monopoly and Restrictive Trade Practices Act made way for huge private investment and expansion. State monopoly of the public sector was significantly reduced to allow private sector to enter in areas hitherto reserved for the state such as capital goods, public utilities, telecommunication etc. This is coupled with the disinvestment of some of the public sectors by selling shares to private companies. As for foreign investment the government moved away from the previous regime's control on foreign trade and investment, which was followed to save the interests of the domestic companies, and made changes in the tariff to attract FDI. Most importantly, the Indian finance sector was incorporated within the world finance system which meant a massive flow of foreign capital in India with huge ramifications for Indian political economy. Along with these changes, the subsidies to various public sectors were either withdrawn or significantly reduced.

So, what we see is that post- 90s there has been a massive re-structuring of Indian economy with deregulation, trade liberalization, financial sector reforms and privatization. As a result there has been the rise to hegemony of the international finance capital through this globalization. The priority to attract investment and to capture capital flight led to a race among states for attracting capital via concession. The consequences of this are captured brilliantly by Prabhat Patnaik:

The essence of these changes lies in a reduction in the strength of the workers and peasants. The fact that state policy tends to focus on appeasing finance capital entails a withdrawal of the state from its role in supporting and protecting petty production against the onslaughts of big capital. This exposes petty producers (such as peasants, craftsmen, fishermen and artisans), and also petty traders to a process of expropriation. Such expropriation occurs both through a direct take over by big capital of their assets, like land, at a throw away prices, and also through a reduction in their “flow” incomes, and hence their capacity to survive, i.e. to carry on with “simple reproduction”. The disposed petty producers throng urban areas in search of work, adding to the number of jobseekers. (Patnaik:2014, p 40)

So, what we see is that capital accumulation under neo-liberal regime continues in both forms- accumulation by expansion and as primitive accumulation. The existing industrial capitalist accumulation continues unabated by extracting ‘surplus labor’ via job cuts, income deflation of the working class aided by the introduction of newer technologies in production. Alongside this, primitive accumulation, often facilitated by the state, has taken various forms, such as accumulation by dispossession, encroachment and coercion. Let us see the features and dynamics of these two accumulative processes in neo-liberal India-

1. Land grab- there has been massive expropriation of land and natural resources by finance capital. Primitive accumulation has encroached on the ‘new commons’ i. e. forests, minerals, fisheries, sand, ground water etc. The creation of new enclosures such as SEZ by the foreign and domestic corporate investors is massive source of capital accumulation.
2. 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.
3. 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.

4. The 'jobless growth' of Indian economy has created a huge sector of self-employed worker. There is also the casualisation of worker under this neo-liberal growth story. The job cuts, wage deflation and eviction of slum dwellers for city planning and urban development are some of the interconnected areas of primitive accumulation in contemporary India.

However, this march of capital has not been a smooth one. The onslaught on the peasants, the workers, petty producers and others led to antagonistic protest movements. These include the protests against the land grabs for SEZ as in anti-Posco movement in Orissa, the movement against TATA plant in Singur, the protest against the seizure of mineral rich tribal lands in Chattishgarh, social movements against large scale displacement by various infrastructural as well as other projects such as hydal power projects, worker protests such as Maruti workers' protest, protests by slum dwellers against eviction, opposition by retailers against shopping malls. These protests have been of two types- within the legal constitutional norms such as petitioning and demonstrations as well as violent protests against the state such as the Maoist insurgency in Chattishgarh and other parts of India. The Govt response to these violent protests have resulted in counter insurgency operations such as Operation Green Hunt, often backed by private vigilante force like Salwa Judum.

Neo-Subalterns

So, what we are witnessing is that the process of postcolonial capitalism both in its advanced and primitive accumulative form is throwing up newer domains of subalternisation and domination such as- the forceful dislocation and eviction of a huge number of people because of various developmental projects, the expulsion of the adivasis from their mineral reach

areas, the de-peasantisation because of the agricultural crisis. This however has not led to proletarianisation of the work force because of lack of intake capacity of the formal capitalist sector which on the contrary gone for casualisation of workers. This has led significant chunk of people to the precarious and subhuman condition of work as unorganized labour, a huge informal sector of subsistence labour engaged in daily 'need economy'. The outflow of people from rural areas in search of work is expanding the horizon of the 'planet of the slums'. However, these processes and the subsequent subalternisation of people are not new. But the scale and intensity of these processes have risen exponentially under neoliberal regime of primitive accumulation. It is to locate and characterize this phenomenon that we are applying the term neo-subaltern of neo-liberal capital. In the subsequent section we would be dealing with one such category of the neo-subaltern namely the unorganized migrant labourers. For this, we have done a field work of three villages of Malda district, a district of West Bengal which sees a great number of unorganized labourers engaged in work in various sectors across the country.

Field Work on Unorganised Migrant Workers of Malda

Objectives of the Study

- To probe into their socio economic status
- To probe into the dynamics of the phenomenon called labour migration
- To investigate the reasons behind the migration of labourers
- To investigate the working and living condition of the migrant labours at work place
- To represent their perspectives regarding migration
- To find out any kind of resistance from their part and way out

Demography – Selected Villages

Malda is the gateway of North Bengal. It is located between latitudes 24*40'20"N to longitudes 25*32'8" N and longitudes 87*45'50" E to 88*28'10" E. Malda is formed of an area of 3733,59 km. It has a population of 3,997,970 according to the 2011 report. Malda is a MID rated district. According to the Human Development Index (Human Development Report 2004) Malda ranks 17th out of the 18 districts of West Bengal.

The district consists of two subdivisions that are Sadar Malda and Chanchal. The selected villages for our study are Satghoria, Babupur and Budhia and belong to the Malda subdivision. The numbers of households in these three villages are 232, 510 and 450. From Malda town these villages are 11-13 km away by bus route. These villages are basically agrarian based society and huge number of people work out of West Bengal as daily wage labourers.

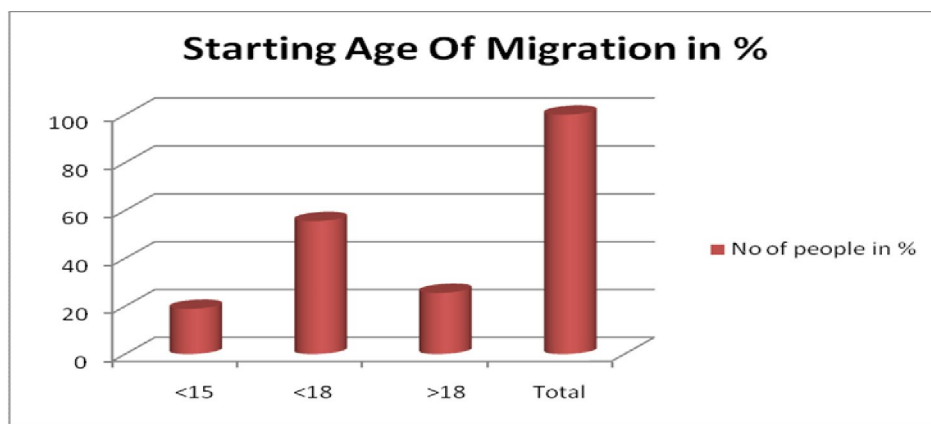
Methodology

The method of study that has been implemented to fulfil the work is field based data collection using sampling method. Data collection was done with the help of semi structured interview schedule containing both open and close ended questions. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected by using the semi structured questionnaire as well as interviews. A sample of 90 households is taken (30 from each village) from three villages. The method of cluster sampling has been followed. Several indicators are selected to highlight the nuances of labour migration. To capture more in-depth information two focus group and few case studies were conducted.

Table no. 1 : Starting Age of Migration (in %)

Starting Age of Migration	<15	<18	>18	Total
No of Person in %	18.89	55.55	25.56	100

Figure No. 1: Starting Age of Migration (in %)

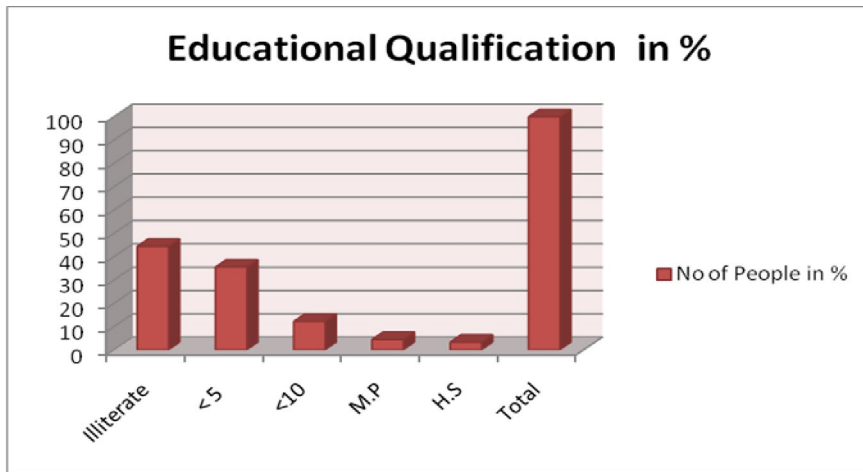


Starting Age of Migration: To trace the starting age of migration of the migrant labourers, three age categories are selected. The above table shows the categories are <15, <18 and >18. 18.89 % of the migrants started to migrate from the age of 12-14 years . 55.55 % of them started migrating from the age of 15-17. Only 25.55% of the migrants went after the age of 18. The percentage shows the tendency of child labour.

Table no. 2: Educational Qualification of the Migrant Labourers (in %)

Educational Qualification	Illiterate	<5 Class	<10 Class	M.P	H.S	Total
No of People in %	44.44	35.56	12.22	4.44	3.34	100

Figure No. 2: Educational Qualification of the Migrant Labours (in %)



Educational Qualification of the Migrant Labours: To assess their educational status five categories are selected such as illiterate, <5 , < 10 , Secondary pass and Higher Secondary pass (classes).44.44% of the migrants are illiterate. 35.56% belong to the category of <5 Class. 12.22% is from the <10 Class category. 4.44% of them have qualified the secondary exam. Only 3.33 % has passed the higher secondary. This data shows their low educational status. Their economic condition affects their education and their low education also affects their work opportunity.

Table no. 3;1: Land Possession (in %)

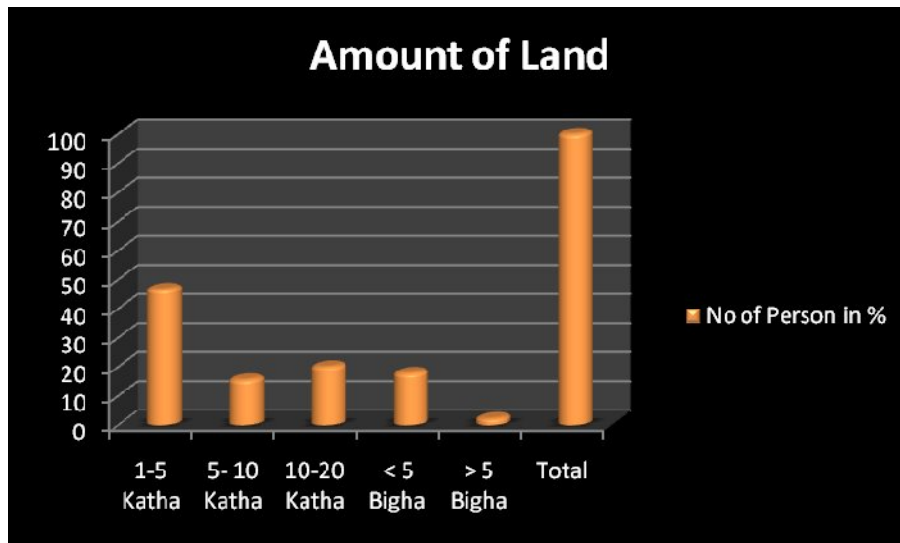
Land Possession	Yes	No
No of People in %	50	50

If Yes,

Table no. 3;2 : Amount of Land (in %)

Land	1-5 Katha	5- 10 Katha	10- 20 Katha	<5 Bigha	>5 Bigha	Total
No of People in %	46.67	15.56	20	17.78	2.22	100

Figure No. 3: Amount of Land (in %)



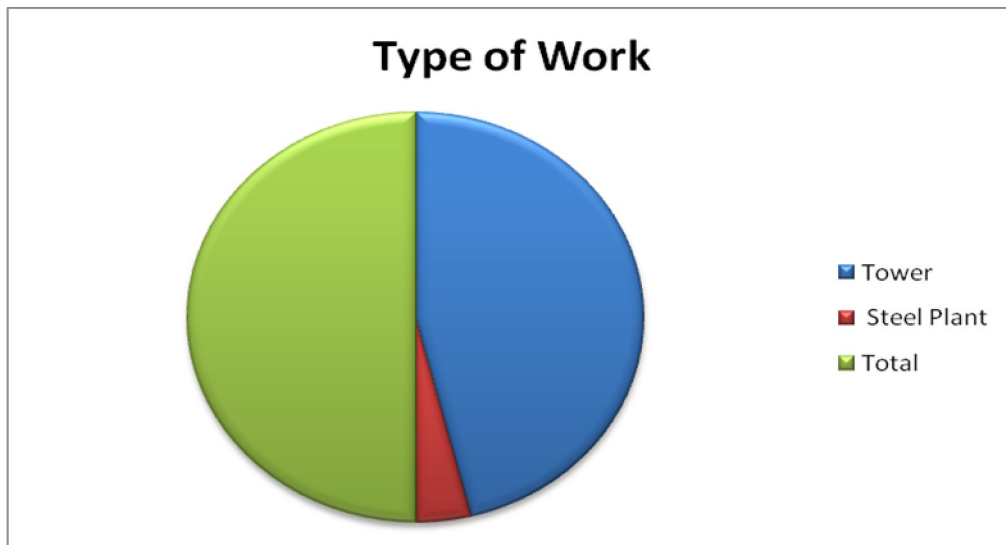
Land possession is a very vital indicator to assess their working pattern and background for migration. 50% of them answered in the positive and 50 % does not have any kind of land. This very 50% of the have nots (in respect of land) have to depend entirely on migration to sustain their family. Even among the land holders every person does not possess the same amount of land . To capture the reality five categories are selected – 1-5 katha,5-10 katha, 10-20 katha, < 5 Bigha and > 5 Bigha. 46.67% of the migrant labours belongs to the first category,15.56% to the second, 20% to the third, 17.78 % to the fourth , and only 2.22% to the last category. Majority possess a very little amount of land. This category is equal to the no land holding category. Their miseries are same. Migrants from second and the third categories also dont find any huge difference between them and the first category.Migrants,those who have <5 bigha and >5 bigha land also migrate. According to

them cultivated land provide only their food, sometimes not even for the entire year. To do any extra thing, apart from food consumption, they need liquid cash. But their land doesnot provide that much profit .To fulfill other basic needs like building house, children’s education, health expenditure i.e. to have the minimum quality of life, they often prefer to send their young ones or they themselves migrate outside the state.

Table no. 4: Type of Work (in %)

Type of Work	Tower	Steel Plant	Total
No of People in %	92.22	7.77	100

Figure No. 4: Type of Work (in %)



Sample migrant labourers are connected chiefly with two kinds of work. These are – transmission or tower construction and steel and other plants. Almost 92.22% of them are connected with tower and 7.77% work in the plants. There is no fixity in the work pattern of the migrants. After completing a project they seek any other job. A migrant labour has to depend on the availability of work. A labour in his entire work-life has done both tower work and the work in plants. A few have also acted as a labourers (mistri/raj mistri) in civil works

as house building and other construction works. Throughout their career they have migrated in various states like Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, - and various companies they have worked are LNT(TATA), Jyoti and oil refinery of Reliance, various construction works and others.

Income

- The two sectors with which migrants are connected offer different wage rates on per day basis. In case of tower there are roughly three levels of work. Wage differs according to the levels. A fitter's per day wage is Rs. 500. While a base maker earns Rs. 350/day. A worker in the initial phase earns Rs. 250 /day. The following table shows the data –

Table No. 5 : Per day income

Levels of Work	Fitter	Base maker	Initial works (Fetching water etc)
Per day income	500	350	250

Income also differs according to the skill .Experienced and skilled workers (usually Fitters) earn nearly Rs. 16000 /month.

- Labours in Steel and other plants earn Rs250-300/day. There is also scope for over time in these factories. In over time they earn the double of what they earn per hour in normal working time schedule.

Remittance and its usage

After spending Rs.3000-4000 to meet the various needs for staying at the work place, they send the remaining amount to their houses. Their family expend the amount to fulfill their daily needs. Majority failed to spend that much for education and health care.

Working Condition

- **Duration of work:** In case of tower usually work starts with fetching water from places 2-10 km away in case of completely unskilled workers. Many start working from the second level that is base maker. After some experience the semi skilled labours are engaged in the erection of the tower. It is only the skilled workers who work as fitters. The official duration of work is 8 am -4 pm. But the fact is that the workers often have to work till 9 pm to complete the project early .
- **No over time/Extra payment:**They dont even get any extra payment for that. There is no option for over time in tower.
- **Dadon/Bond Labour-**With the passing of time the dynamics of dadon has changed.The type of work has also changed. But the bitter working condition has remained the same. Two labourers said that the tower work has taken the form of bonded labour/ dadon as the labourers are often hired with a payment of one or two months.
- **A focus group discussion (with 10 workers from Budhia) on the working condition of the labourers highlighted the high risk and severe working condition of the migrant workers.**

Living condition at work place

- **Train Journey** – Suffering of the workers start from the beginning. Journey by train in the general compartment is the most depressive event at the starting of their career.
- **Housing** – The quality of house depends on the location of the project. If it is situated in a town there is option for room in rent . If it is situated in a remote place they have to stay in a bamboo/tent. They have to sleep on the ground without any pillow or much place to move over. The allotment in a tent is 10-12 persons.
- **Food-** In most cases they have to cook themselves. Company does not provide any food or cost for it. To save money they don't usually take proper nutritious food. In case of bonded labours , they are provided with a very low quality of food.
- **Sanitation-** The location determines the type of sanitation. If in a town, there is the facility for proper sanitation system. But in an interior location, they have to opt for open defecation. For this they often have to face harassment from the locals (land owners whose lands workers use for defecation).
- **Threat from the local-** 'Foreigners are snatching out the locals' jobs' – is the dominant thinking among the locals of the project area. This often leads to violence. The other reason of local threat often arises from the land owners whose land is used directly or indirectly for the project. Often the workers have to face the brunt of this. Some have complaint of beating at the hands of the locals.

Risk of Work

- Tower construction implies more risk in every aspect. Though every migrant labour is registered and insured at the very beginning of their arrival at the work place, risk follows them everywhere. There are different facets of risk such as

I. Risk of Life – Death is the cruelest form of risk that haunts them. It is told that they are asked to use all possible kinds of safety measures but they often don't use all those to complete the task as early as possible, which is the demand of the gang leader / contractor. Usually fitters are at highest danger. There also does not remain any 'safety officer' to check the activities. In case of tower, safety measures are not used properly. So, accident is very common.

- **A case study** has been conducted on this greatest risk. **Habibur Rahman** died five years back while working in tower construction. Although he was insured, his family received no money except the carrying cost of the dead body. The family contacted the local labour union at Malda to find ways to collect money but the labour union demanded 50000 in advance. They hired a middle man and went at the construction site and met the authority and the legal bodies. But they did not receive any money. On the contrary they had to bear the entire cost of the travel.

- The following table shows the number of death cases in the last 5 years in the three selected villages.

Table No.6 : No of Dead Workers in Three Villages

Selected Villages	Satghoria	Babupur	Budhia
No of Dead Workers	7	8	16

II. Uncertainty of Payment- This is also a common phenomenon. If a worker gets the job directly from the company there are chances of fair payment. But company (recognised) offers them less wage than the gang leader or contractor and less work opportunity. Therefore workers usually want to get the job through a GL or a contractor to offer comparatively more wage and further work opportunities/ informations. Here lies the danger. Many times, after the completion of the project, the contractor runs away leaving the labours unpaid. Sometimes petty companies also deprive them from payment. A huge number of workers takes advance money from the gang leader to meet their family's maintenance. At that time the GL offers him a certain rate. After working the GL pays him the remaining amount. There the GL decreases the amount as there remains no officially written document. The worker has to come back with very little amount of money.

III. Stoppage of work in the midst- Due to the threat from the local land owner the company has to stop their project in the middle. As the company faces loss the workers also suffers.

IV. Accident during journey – Many face the unwanted lot during the train journey even.

V. Uncertainty in getting insured money at death

- **Plant- workers** face less risk compare to the tower/transmission workers. Safety measures are strictly maintained. However when any accident happens the authorities try to hush up the matter to avoid legal and financial burden.

Reasons for Migration

- **Scarcity of job opportunity in village-** 90% of the workers said that there is limited job opportunity in village. There are seasonal work opportunities like aam bhanga, paddy cultivation etc. There is no industrial /skill based work.
- **Irregular work** – Jobs in a village are mostly irregular in nature. Short term work push the workers under constant stress. It is often tough to sustain their families with the basic needs.
- **Low wage rate-** the rate of wage in a village is low. This low wage is insufficient for a worker to maintain his family.
- **Agriculture not profitable** – Those who have some portion of land also opt for migration. With the increase of price of fertiliser, diesel and other accessories, agriculture has become very costly. But the price of grains is not enough. So there remains no scope for money making/profit. The cultivated rice often does not last for the entire year. Workers have to buy rice for the rest of the time. Those who have land are doing the field works on their own and hire minimum labour so that they can minimise the cost of production. Often they migrate leaving the task of cultivation to their wives and small children which affect the education of the children. This is again leading to less work opportunity for those staying at village.
- **Constant source of work** – The workers find regular work at the work place.
- **Deficiencies of MGNREGA-** According to the workers MGNREGA has several deficiencies
 - I. It provides irregular work.

- II. It provides low wage i.e Rs.152 /day.
- III. It is biased in providing jobs.
- IV. Getting a job is a complex and lengthy procedure.
- V. After completing the work they often have to wait 5-6 months to get their payment. Many have not yet got their payments.

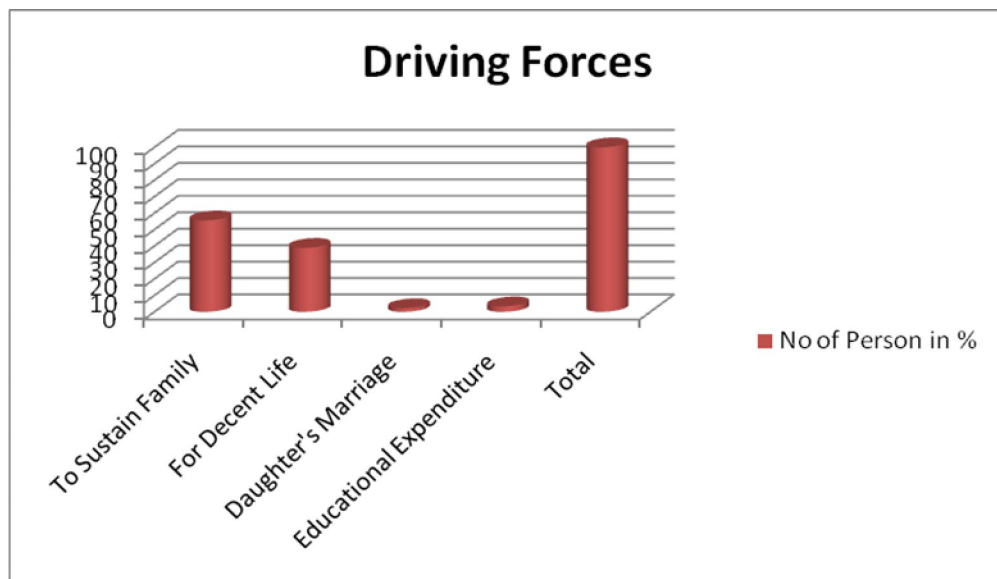
Thus, it is leading to the feminization of work as male workers are migrating for better oppurtunities.

The driving forces in general are discussed below. Data is presented in the table.

Table no.7: Driving Forces Behind Migration (in %)

Driving Forces	To Sustain Family	Aspiration for a Decent Life *	Daughter's Marriage	Educational Expenditure	Total
No of People in %	55.56	38.89	2.22	3.33	100

Figure No. 5: Driving Forces Behind Migration (in %)



To have a general overview of the driving forces four categories are selected .These categories are sustenance of family,for decent life, daughter's marriage and for educational expenditure. Almost 55.56% conveyed that they migrate for work to sustain their families. Otharwise scarcity of work at village will lead them towards starvation. 38.89% of them migrate to fulfill their desire to lead a descent life. 2.22% of the sample told that they have migrated to arrrange money for their daughter's marriage. 3.33% of the migrants from the <15 and <18 age group migrate to earn money for their educational expenditure. After working 3-4 months they come back with their earned money and then invest for education. When needed they earn money in this way.

Resistance - If any labourer protests against the pathetic condition of work the gang leader or the contractor asks him to leave the job as he can easily replace the labourer because there is a huge 'reserve army' of labourers at the village.

Above we have tried to show the unorganised migrant workers as the neo-subaltern of neo-liberal capital. Although here the labourers are not the direct outcome of displacement and dislocation of various capitalist developmental projects, the agrarian crisis under various neo-liberal reforms has led to de-peasantization and the shrinking of job opportunity in the villages. This coupled with high inflation and the need to survive has forced many from the villages to migrate seasonally, in many cases for a much longer time. The inhuman condition of workplace, the life risk and at times the loss of payment notwithstanding they continue to migrate for work. The failure to properly implement the various laws makes them more vulnerable to the rapacious mechanism of greed of the companies and their contracting agents.

Discourse of Governmentality and Beyond

So, how are the people coping with this ongoing march of capital both in its expansive form as well as primitive form? Kanyal Sanyal in *Rethinking Capitalist Development* interestingly draws our attention to the question of governmentality to explicate the nature of postcolonial capitalist accumulation in neo-liberal India. Under the pressure of global developmental discourse and local electoral democracy the state takes up various counter measures to primitive accumulation. Drawing on Foucault's views of biopolitical power and governmentality, Sanyal points out 'the outside of capital'- the poor peasants, petty producers and the mammoth informal sector – who bear the brunt of primitive accumulation- needs to be politically managed. The political and ideological justification of capital accumulation can be achieved by transferring some of its gains to this 'need economy' which harbours a huge number of self employed labourers. It is the 'taking care of its castaways' that guaranty the peaceful march of capital in postcolonial India. Sanyal writes-

The arising of capital leaves in its wake a surplus population- those who have lost their access to the means of labor but are unable to sell their labor-power as a commodity. They constitute a space outside capital's own realm, the space of poverty, and although capital is economically self-subsistent, its political and ideological conditions of existence depend on how this space is negotiated.... This requires that a part of the capitalist surplus be transferred from the domain of capital for implementing anti-poverty programs; development now means a reversal of primitive accumulation.(Sanyal:2007, p 175)

So, the governmental techniques, by giving entitlements to the poor and productive resources such as credit, inputs and technology to constitute the need based production activities to the informal sector, attempts to reverse the process of primitive accumulation. This logic of governmentality is endorsed by Partha Chatterjee with slight modification as he talks about the 'reversal of consequences of primitive accumulation', in stead of reversal of primitive accumulation per se.

However, the theorization of Sanyal has been questioned variously. As primitive accumulation is not merely the quantitative transfer of resources from the non-capital to the capital, Sanyal's theorization of 'reversal of primitive accumulation' without the reversal of concomitant social and class structures is insufficient (Adnan). And empirically we know that after neo-liberal reforms the state has withdrawn many of its subsidies instead of enforcing them. Jean Drez in an article in *The Hindu* questions the mythologies of the overburden of subsidies to the poor on the Indian economy by pointing out that the Indian government's expenditure on various social welfare schemes are significantly lower than many of the developing states and also draws our attention to the subsidies to the corporate sector given in the name of tax cuts. This enlightened view of a well meaning state taking up ameliorative steps to provide the livelihood options to the people does not take into account the comprador nature of democracy under the hegemony of finance capital-where the state appears more as a facilitator to the global capital and in doing that can even reduce those opposed to the complicity to status of 'bare life'. Arundhati Roy sufficiently draws our attention to these mechanisms of the state machinery where the state itself resorts to illegal and draconian means to suppress the questioning voices- where the democracy becomes 'demon-crazy'.

So, what kind of radical politics the subaltern can come up with? What are the options available to them? Partha Chatterjee in recent writings draws our attention to the implications of economic transformation and the role of democracy in India after neo-liberal reforms. He thinks that while neoliberal capital is gaining unparalleled legitimacy within the elites of civil society, the unprecedented reach of the administrative functionaries of the state in the hitherto un-accessed subaltern domains leaves nothing outside the state. The externality of the state against which the subaltern struggle was pitted is no longer a valid analytical tool. Subaltern politics needs to be re-thought via governmental discourse. Therefore, the politics subalterns

are engaged with is the 'politics of the governed'- the politics of negotiations with the administrative bodies for survival benefits. But, can politics of governmentality offer the subalterns with any space for radical change of their status? Can negotiatory politics cumulatively and incrementally bring about any change to the existing structures of inequality as its advocates are suggesting? Or it is acting as a kind of ploy/ a tactical strategy on the part of state and capital to keep them in their existing condition so that they do not question the ongoing socio-political and economic hierarchies? If it is so, what alternative ways of politics can be thought of? Can Subaltern Studies in its existing analytical paradigm offer that emancipatory politics? Or a re-theorisation of Subaltern Studies is necessary? Before we go into those issues let us briefly discuss the arrival of subaltern Studies in the Indian academic field and the criticism it has drawn from various quarters recently.

Subaltern Saboteur and the Debate over Historiography

Subaltern Studies Collective emerged as an academic saboteur in Indian academic historiography by challenging the dominant narratives of Indian nationalism-whether of colonial, bourgeois national or traditional Marxist variations - which were conspicuous for their total disregard of the struggles of the subaltern/popular classes. The project appeared in a specific historico-political conjuncture. It was the 'product of its time'. The radical popular protests of the 60s and 70s, specially of the peasants , the imposition of Emergency, the highhanded response o the Indian state to he civil unrest of the times created a legitimacy crisis of the Indian state. The Indian left party's support for the oppression of the state created a mood to move beyond the categorical imperatives of traditional left. Subaltern Studies sought to provide an alternative epistemology, methodology and a new paradigm for understanding those times. In this the Subaltern Studies Collective was influenced by the social history of Hill, Habsbawm and especially of Thompson and their approach of writing

'history from below'. Thus, Subaltern Studies emerged with the expressive purpose of 'rectifying the elite bias' of Indian historiography which presents the history of Indian nationalism as 'a sort of spiritual biography of the Indian elite'. Ranajit Guha writes:

The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism-colonialist elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism...Both these varieties of elitism share the prejudice that the making of the Indian nation and the development of the consciousness-nationalism-which informed this process, were exclusively or predominantly elite achievements.(Guha:1994,p 1)

The 'statism that manifest itself in the nationalist and Marxist discourses' denied the 'small voices of history' to be heard. Subaltern Studies attempted to foreground the masses as the agents of their own history as it sought to acknowledge 'the contribution made by the people on their own that is independently of the elite to the making and development of this nationalism'. Subaltern Studies sought to liberate the disenfranchised voices of history and empower the masses Thus, what Subaltern Studies project was engaged with is social justice.

Change of track: Criticism of Subaltern Studies

But there has been a clear shift in Subaltern Studies with the change of guard when Ranajit Guha retired as editor and under Partha Chatterjee and others the project moved away from the focus on subaltern classes to the critique of Western rationality and its modernizing project under colonialism and the postcolonial nation state. This shift has been succinctly captured by Sumit Sarkar, a member of the Subaltern Studies Collective, who left the group because of this shift. He writes:

A quick count indicates that all fourteen essays in Subaltern Studies I and II had been about under privileged groups in Indian society-peasants, tribals and in one instance workers. The corresponding figure for volume VII and VIII is, at most four out of twelve. Guha's preface and introductory essay in the first volume had been full of references to 'subaltern classes', evocations of Gramsci, and the use of much Marxian terminology. Today, the dominant thrust within the project- or at least the one that gets most attention- is focused on critiques of Western power-knowledge, with non-Western community consciousness as its valorized alternative.(Ludden:2013, p 400)

There has been clear rejection of the 'so called economics' and Marxism is discredited as another instance of Eurocentricism. However, this move is overdetermined by the changes in Western academic and political discourses in post-1989 fall of Communism and the world wide disenchantment with Marxism. In the attempt to move beyond the imperative of 'writing better Marxist histories' and the questioning of the habitations of modernity/ nation-state, SS embraced 'linguistic turn' and postmodernist anti-establishment discourse. The association of Gayatri Spivak, Said and other members brought Subaltern Studies close to postcolonial criticism. For this 'transformed Subaltern Studies' domination is

(C)onceptualized overwhelmingly in cultural discursive terms, as the power-knowledge of the post-Enlightenment West. If at all seen as embodied concretely in institutions, it tends to get identified uniquely with the modern bureaucratic nation-state: further search for specific socio-economic interconnections is felt to be unnecessarily economic redolent of traces of a now finally defeated Marxism and hence disreputable'. (Ludden:2013, p 402)

Thus, when subordination is viewed as merely cultural and discursive, insubordination can only be cultural and cultural difference came to be celebrated as the new autonomous zone. Community consciousness is thus pitted against western rationality, the celebration of the fragments as opposed to the nation-state, the arbiter of enlightenment rationality. Thus, there is the move to re-write history from the grounds of difference. The shift from capitalist colonial exploitation to enlightenment rationality leads to authentically indigenous past or fragmented present. This culturalism or prioritization of the value culture and psychoanalysis as opposed to the material culture of the people and social analysis does not take the emancipatory project of Subaltern Studies far as it ignores the analysis of the material conditionalities of subordination and devising ways for change. In his book, *Postcolonial Theory and the Scepter of capital* Vivek Chibber advances a Marxist critique of Subaltern studies and accuses Subaltern Studies of perpetuating the 'orientalistic paradigm' of the east

as unique 'other' which can not be analysed by western epistemic and analytical optics. Critically analyzing the works of the main authors of Subaltern Studies Collective Chibber points out that Subaltern Studies lost a unique opportunity of advancing an emancipatory political agenda by discarding the class analysis and embracing 'culturalism' as its epistemic and political concern.

Listening to the Grasshoppers: The Postcolonial Predicament and Materialist/ Praxial Subaltern Politics

What implications do the newer forms of subordination and antagonism discussed above hold for Subaltern Studies? In a recent article in EPW, 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. Our argument is that Subaltern Studies needs to re-engage with the material conditions of subordination of the neo-subalterns of global capital to re-energies the subaltern/democratic politics of counter narrative of resistance, something we seldom can see under neo-liberal postcolonial capitalism. It has to listen to the grasshoppers of Indian democracy and offer emancipator politics for substantive justice. Ranabir Samaddar draws our attention to the postcolonial predicament which he thinks is marked by dialectics in three main areas-the postcolonial imprint on knowledge formation in which the postcolonies appear merely as translator of their real life specificities to the metropolitan centres for theory formation on that, the salience of primitive accumulation even when the postcolony develops

and the emergence of precariat and immaterial labour. The 'near permanent condition of primitive accumulation' has forced a vast number of people to a primitive and precarious condition of work. This precarious labor/ immaterial labour however is managed by the creation of 'durable inequality' via welfarist governmentality. This 'unequal situations' can only produce 'ineffective citizenship politics' which only exacerbates the predicament-

'The predicament increases because the market does not efface inequality, but accept the frame of durable inequality to effect transactions and helps capital to realize the surplus.' (EPW, 2013, p 47)

What is the way out then? Samaddar talks about the emergence of the multitude out of the precariat which will work towards a paraxial and democratically transformative society. For a radical political roadmap, we propose, Subaltern Studies has to come up with materialist and paraxial political optics and strategy. The existing paradigm of culturalism needs to be replaced for a materialist approach that addresses the newer forms of inequality and subjugation that are coming up along with the existing inequalities. Politics of governmentality or political society can be one way the subalterns do their daily politics of negotiations over livelihood means. But that does not exhaust subaltern politics. And politics of political society can at times be detrimental to the 'margins of the margins'. As Ajay Gudavarthy shows in his field study of the protest movement against industrial pollution of the villagers of Kazipally that under the repression of the state and financial elites the collective solidarity of the villagers are fragmented in interest based groups and individuals and generate perpetual insecurity for the vulnerable. Moreover, the politics of political society can not bring about any radical structural change in social inequality. On the contrary it can perpetuate it. The politics of political society does not take into account the action, strategy and agency of the subalterns which produces/challenges the dynamics of power. The contentious politics and widespread popular resistance has many a times checked the march of primitive accumulation and also made significant impact on governmental institutions and

governance. These oppositionary politics needs to be highlighted. There is ample evidence of the social and political movements in India making impressive strides in securing the rights of the subalterns.

Subaltern Studies emerged as a voice of justice by re-orienting the academic / public discourse towards the subjugated and unheard voices of history. The contemporary public discourse/ public sphere is pre-occupied with the aspirational middle class who dream of being a super power. In all these there is no room for the neo-subalterns of this 'new India'. Who will then talk about the subalterns? Subaltern Studies can play an important role here. It has to address the existing forms of inequality and also the emerging ones. The enchantment with democracy in India needs to be questioned and the rights of subaltern needs to be emphasized. The existing loopholes, the aberrations and pathologies of democracy need to be highlighted. The liberal idea of democracy, thus, needs to be constantly problematised, questioned, and kept in check so that a balanced and fuller form of democracy can emerge one day. Subaltern Studies thus needs to respond to this call by re-energising the debate over public reason by including the question of the neo-subaltern for a just and fair republic. For doing this it has to take materialist and paraxial approach rather than continuing with the culturalist framework.

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