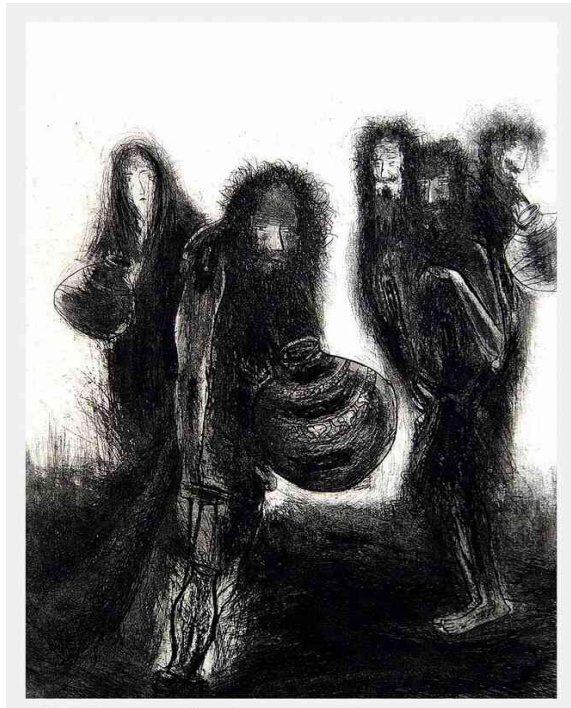


Department of Germanic and Romance Studies, University of Delhi  
Annual International Conference (21-22 February 2025)  
CALL FOR PAPER  
*When Subaltern speaks...: Interrogating Marginalities*



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*“What happens to a deferred dream?”* – Langston Hughes asked in his iconic poem *“Harlem”*.

The question resonated throughout America during the Civil Rights Movements counterposing against the hegemonic ‘American Dream’. And it resonates with equal validity everywhere for all those people who, by accident of birth or fate, find themselves thrust onto a precarious margin, as the ‘subaltern figure’. Interestingly Hughes proffered an answer in the same poem for this vast majority at the margins, *“Maybe it just sags/ Like a heavy load./ Or does it explode?”*

Hughes’ poetic solution staked two antithetical and sharp alternatives for those languishing at the margins, as it vividly indicated the only options available to the oppressed and excluded – either submit to the subjugation or resist the oppression. Even though Hughes was making the case for his African American brothers and sisters, ‘Harlem’ could very well symbolize all the subalterns and their plight.

Originally used by Antonio Gramsci, the term ‘subaltern’ has been expanded upon by the scholars of the Subaltern Studies Group and later by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who brought to the fore the matrix of marginalization and exclusion that has always been engineered by the dominant class to coerce many communities across the globe to total subjugation, preventing them any voice or place in the power structure. Prior to it, scholars like Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire and others interrogated the wretchedness and precarity of the colonized subject much before the term ‘subaltern’ became a discursive phrase to demonstrate the machinations of colonial power that coincided with capital, race, and gender. Notably, one of the first protests about the plight of colonized subjects was found in writings of Friar Bartolomé de las Casas ‘A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies’ (1542) that recorded the atrocities committed against the indigenous people of Americas, prompting the Argentine historian and decoloniality scholar Enrique Dussel to proclaim Las Casas as the *first critic* of European imperialism and modernity.

Individuals and communities have endured exclusion, scourge, and persecution as the hegemon have 'naturalised' the so-called differences, erecting and controlling the power structures based on race, caste, class, gender, ethnicity, etc. within which they confined the people.

Rooted in the postcolonial theories, the figure of the subaltern finally gained a certain visibility in the twentieth century when European colonialism ceded, and the newly formed nations were compelled to confront these so-called naturalised differences. Interrogating the supposed natural realities unmasked how those who wielded power established social and cultural categories to exercise political domination and how language, history cultural practices, religion, education, literature and many such apparatuses were appropriated to ideologically justify this domination. Arguments of whites' natural supremacy over other ethnic races, men's natural superiority over women and other gender identities, bourgeoisie's natural right of predominance over the resources including that of the lives of the working class, etc. were made to imply as historically justifiable or even that nature intended it so.

However, these positions were openly challenged when postcolonial scholarship debated the very essence of knowledge production from diverse vantage points. No longer, the subjects are homogenous, nor do they challenge singular hegemonizing authority, but they recognise their own complex matrix of subjugation. Rigoberta Menchú, thus, voices the atrocities suffered by the indigenous Maya Quiché people under the Spanish colonialism as well as during postcolonial dictatorial regimes in Guatemala. Annie Ernaux examines the periphery of French societies in her works that silences and marginalises the proletariat who are not inhabiting in the urban centres. Dalit writings that explore not just their own existential realities, but the utterances of those realities expose the violence that pierced those lives.

Recent times have witnessed new strains of knowledge production as well as re-examining the already existing traditions of thought, both within and outside the academy, which have explored the subject of the subaltern ascribing it a more diverse and layered understanding. It has proceeded beyond the relationship between coloniser and the colonised subject or between the question of liberation and representation and to more epistemologically nuanced meanings.

In this conference, we invite presentations across disciplines to unravel the differentiated and nuanced meanings of what is the 'subaltern' beyond the colonial critique and engage in dialogues about the new shifts to the subaltern question.

Papers are invited but not limited to the following themes:

1. Imagination of the subaltern in colonial and postcolonial literature
2. Dichotomous relations between coloniser and colonised
3. Representations of the Indigenous
4. Subalternity and Gendered subjects
5. Cultural and literary creations by Dalit, Indigenous communities, First Nations
6. Alienation and marginality in postcolonial Europe

**The conference will be organised from 21-22 February 2025**

Abstracts of not more than 300 words, that include the paper title, your academic affiliation, and contact information, must be submitted to [dgrs.conference@gmail.com](mailto:dgrs.conference@gmail.com) by **2 January 2025**.