Discussing Hegemony and Subaltern Perspective of Cultural Heritage in India

Mr. Bhagirath
Ph.D. Research Scholar
Govind Guru Tribal University, Banswara
Rajasthan, India- 327001
&
Dr. Seema Bhupendra
Professor
Department of English
Shri Govind Guru Government College
Banswara, Rajasthan, India- 327001
Email: basulilar@gmail.com

Abstract: History of cultural heritage is as old as human civilization. Cultural heritage plays an important role to locate history. Both culture and cultural heritage are interlinked. Culture represents traditions, value system and everyday life whereas heritage is inherited in us. Various critics and theorists have come up with different versions of culture. Both these phenomenon are linked with past. It is seen as the contribution of past to the coming ages. Cultural heritage includes monuments, art, paintings, folklore, oral tradition and our social institutions. India has a rich cultural heritage. There are historical monuments, art(s), paintings and literature. Eventually media does not represent through the perspectives of masses. Cinema in India claims to represent our cultural heritage but most of the time it excludes the contribution and representation of subalterns. Antonio Gramsci used the term 'subalterns' in the similar sense as Marx used 'proletariat'. Subaltern in cultural heritage has always been oppressed. But the question 'whose heritage it is' remained unanswered. The paper attempts to explore the contribution of subaltern in cultural heritage of India. The paper will also analyse hegemony of media and shall also interrogate cultural heritage through subaltern perspective. The paper shall also draw some examples from Indian cinema to substitute the argument.

Kew words: Hegemony, Subaltern, Culture, Heritage and Media.

Introduction

History of cultural heritage is as old as human civilization. Cultural heritage plays an important role to locate history. Both culture and cultural heritage are interlinked. Culture represents traditions, value system and everyday life whereas heritage is inherited in us. Various critics and theorists have come up with different versions of culture. Both these phenomenon are linked with past. It is seen as the contribution of past to the coming ages. Cultural heritage includes monuments, art, paintings, folklore, oral tradition and our social institutions. Albeit there have been dominance by the ruling classes on these institutions. These institutions have been grown up under the shade of hegemonic structure. In a society, there are different ideas, concepts, ways of life, languages, etc but ironically enough the ideas, and concepts of one social group seems to dominate the rest of the society. Cultural heritage has been represented from the point of view of ruling class. Media has a very important role to play in it. Media always represents the social institutions through certain set of models designed by the oppressive ruling class and the capitalist market.

India has a rich cultural heritage. There are historical monuments, art(s), paintings and literature. Eventually media does not represent through the perspectives of masses. Cinema in India claims to represent our cultural heritage but most of the time it excludes the contribution and representation of subalterns. Antonio Gramsci used the term 'subalterns' in the same sense as Marx used 'proletariat'. Subaltern in cultural heritage has always been oppressed. But the question 'whose heritage it is' remained unanswered.

To proceed further, it is pertinent to explain both culture and cultural heritage and to draw similarities in order to trace out the lineages between the two. 'Culture' the term has obtained different meaning through ages. In the later phase of modern history, it appears in various forms known as popular culture, mass culture, elite culture, high culture and so on. In the wake of similar process Raymond Williams, a well known cultural theorist and major proponent of Cultural Studies coined the term 'Cultural Materialism' to trace out the process of hegemonic force in society. It primarily focuses on cultural and literary production rather

than on conception. Williams rejects Marxist concept of culture and argues for a change by focusing on a more interactive and less hierarchical model. Williams calls it basic component of an evolving social process. Further, he calls culture a way of life, the lived texture of any social order. He rejects traditional boundaries, between 'high' culture and 'popular' culture, and insists that culture is more than the visible sign of a special type of cultivated people, and called culture "ordinary" because it is fundamental to each individual in every society. Further, he adds the historical process as an important tool through which culture with certain substitute has evolved in the present shape. Richard L Velkley primarily has identified two basic meanings "culture as the folk spirit having a unique identity, and culture as cultivation of inwardness or free individuality" (Velkley, 2002, p.11).

Similarly, cultural heritage in a broader way falls under two categories. Several international organisation and critics have identified it as 'tangible cultural heritage' and 'intangible cultural heritage'. It always looks through the glasses of history and traces the different ways of living in different community at particular juncture of history. With the term 'cultural heritage', masses conceive the famous historical monuments and archaeological sites etc. But it is more than that of masses' conceived ideas. Cultural heritage is a living account of generation to generation and their practices, everyday life, artefacts, folklore, religion, values system, festivals, language(s) and rituals. As a part of human activity and human civilization it is an essential part of every culture across the globe. Both tangible and intangible forms of cultural heritage contain different forms of our recent history/ past. Critics like Ken Yenge and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have distinguished these different forms in "built environment and natural environment" (Culture in Development). The former includes historical monuments, townscapes, and archaeological buildings; and the later includes landscapes, mountains, coasts, agricultural heritage and artefacts. Literature, documents, paintings, pictures, art forms and different objects also represent cultural heritage of culture(s). Cultural heritage has been manifested through these different means; and media plays a very important part to manifest these cultural artefacts. The tangible form of cultural heritage has been manifested through the eyes of the ruling class. It does not represent the part played by masses to build all these monuments and buildings. In the Indian context, it can be understood through the popular narratives of world

class cultural heritage sites as the Taj Mahal, the Red Fort, and the Victory Tower which only have popular narratives of the rulers who ruled and built these sites; and completely ignores contribution of people. The intangible cultural heritage which is invisible also represents the popular voice of people, their value system, and traditions, oral and folk history. It is perceived through their way of dinning, cuisine, traditional skills, religious rituals, folk festivals, folk narratives, and performing arts. Both the forms of cultural heritage are bound with each other. These forms represent our past through different mediums and it inculcates an idea in the mind of people about our history through various stages e.g. how people understand, perceive it, value it and enjoy it.

There are certain things and questions pander upon the role of culture heritage. There have been endless debates and discussions on how it is important for us and why do we need to preserve it? The different sites need a lot of maintenance and resources to preserve them. Questions have been raised at different levels by politicians, diplomats, ambassadors and thinkers to as to how it is relevant for people. In the era of globalisation priorities of human beings have been changed. In neoliberal world bread and butter became a bitter question because of exploitations of masses by capitalist forces; cultural heritages are consider as part of pleasure/ luxury which can only be afforded by the rich. It certainly has no use for the common. But, many thinkers observe that it carries the whole history of class struggle and it is the basic need for us to preserve it.

Various art forms are important part of it. It is very pertinent for human civilisation to preserve and expand its popular forms which can offer an alternative view point of history. Sometimes, history becomes very rude, and it neglects the contribution of common people then cultural heritage and especially its intangible forms are an alternative medium to represent and relocate the past through the perspective of masses. To present, a different view point it is very necessary for the people to analyse the struggles, exploitations through a completely different perspective.

Media has an important role to portray cultural heritage. As it is said, media is basically a medium to communicate through which data, news, entertainment and education related topics are disseminated. In the era of globalisation and technology media has

expanded its medium to online web portals, new media while accompanying traditional modes such as television, newspapers and cinema. In present time critics have distinguished media in two major categories as mainstream media and alternative media. Both these categories claim to function for providing information, entertainment and education. It is pertinent to know that media is a vivacious economic sector, one of the most profitable sectors and achieving global recognition. It has become a part of industry and model of mass production. It aims as mass audience; it must echo popular folk narrative, oral tradition and alternative literature but rather doing that it inculcates ruling ideas in the mind of masses. It is not only a tool for communication, but profoundly implanted in culture, its ideologies and discourses. It influences and guides on public opinion, tastes and values, and also provides the materials for people to falsify their identity "Global media flows, structures, and processes are central to the production of cultural identity in the present historical moment" (Chopra, 2011, p.7). Media moulds our sense of self and the other, and influences our sense of class, ethnicity, race, nationality, and sexuality. It also forms the perceptions and the deepest values for the masses; and guides on what to be considered good and bad, moral and evil, positive and negative. Hegemony in general is power through consent. Media moulds perceptions through consents. Media particularly shows up particular ideology. In hegemony of media power plays a significant role to locate a particular ideas and ideologies. Hegemony relies on physical force, economic constraints and other coercive techniques. Media exploits these tools mandatorily.

Cultural heritage, in the both forms has been represented through the hegemonic media. Subaltern perspective read into ideologies of differences and otherness. Hegemonic media has terribly failed to locate both the tangible and intangible forms of cultural heritage whereas subaltern scholars portray an alternative history.

Indian media has portrayed subaltern almost in negative sense be it in newspapers, cinemas, and any other forms. Here I proceed further with distinguishing hegemony of media into two parts. The tangible cultural heritage has been represented in mainstream media through the perspective of ruling class. Most of the time mainstream media glorify historical monuments whereas they negatively portray the image of marginalised. In bollywood, major film production houses glorify the maharajas, forts and ignore the contribution made by the

people in creating such glorious images. Sanjay Leela Bhansali, director, producer and screenwriter in his films, Bajirao Mastani, glorifies the Maratha emperor; ignores atrocities and suppression caused by them to the people living in periphery. There are a few of films by him which particularly represent the people living in periphery. Ashutosh Gowrikar, in his film Jodha Akabar magnify the period of Mughal emperor. Their major concern is not to portray marginalised rather they focus on audiences as media is now an industry. They may not have an urge to raise their problems, listen their arguments rather they attract to the award ceremonies, film premiers etc. Talk shows and reality shows are now emerging as more audience and profit oriented medium and somewhere they successfully locate their hegemony to the audience. Similarly in news channels and newspaper, subaltern do not find place unless and until they are of very important cause.

In the beginning of 21st century media has become totally, a profit oriented organisation. It has emerged out as purely political affairs. During the initial days of subaltern studies, scholars developed a kind of discourse to represent the people's narrative filled up with native culture by rejecting official history of elites and state sponsored narration. Their major concern was to "rectify elitist bias" as Ranjit Guha said; but subaltern still failed to occupy their space in mainstream media and history. In cultural heritage, dominance of a particular group prevails and hides failure of elitist institutions.

In the intangible form of cultural heritage, hegemony of social institutions never allows them to speak. Mainstream media never provides an opportunity to exhibit them. In case of folklore, oral narrative and manuscript, mainstream media and publication houses do not pay attention to them. There are several communities without any precise language system. They express themselves through the songs, carving on walls, woods and paintings. 'Speech Syndicate' in Maharashtra belongs to a particular community who translates any language through gestures with hands. In Lakshadweep people write their history on woods. In Madhya Pradesh people make painting on their walls to denote the history of Narmada River and there are many more traditions of manuscript in diverse nation India. In literature, folklore and oral traditions have been side lined by mainstream publication houses.

Mainstream media never pay any attention to the tribal rich cultural heritage and diversity rather they seek anything which portray them as negative. I think all these aspects should be taken seriously in order to counter hegemony of media. To preserve cultural heritage, we need to relocate subalterns in mainstream and to save their languages, customs and traditions.

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