



RESEARCH PAPER

Historicity of Expropriation in History of India in *History at the Limits of World's History* by Ranajit Guha

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ABSTRACT

In the scenario of decolonization, historiography plays a vital role in anticolonial endeavors. As decolonization took place the written history was challenged and questioned by scholars for its discursive element. The power structures not only manipulated history but misrepresented colonized people and estates. The present research highlights a significant facet of historicity-the expropriation of history. The study reveals that history of the world is formulated by hegemonic powers in order to oppress those who were powerless in the process of colonization. The anticolonial resistance demands an assertion on the part of native identity. The study by looking into Guha's work , *History at the Limits of World's History* traces the reclamation of India's history in the face of discussion. By narrating Tagore's stance of the significance of the past, Guha provides in his critique an avenue to the revised history of colonized states. The study presents Stephen Greenblatt's theory of new historicism and analyzed the disjunctions in the empirical nature of history which refrained the subjugated subalterns to emancipate from the hegemonic web of historicity.

Keywords: Expropriation, Hegemony, Historicity, India, New Historicism

Introduction

In the scenario of decolonization, historiography has played a vital role in anticolonial endeavor. This study follows the pattern by highlighting a significant facet of historicity-the expropriation of history. The study reveals that history of the world is formulated by hegemonic powers in order to oppress those who were powerless in the process of colonization. An innovator in historiography of post-colonial India, Ranajit Guha's contribution is immense in the field. Born on 23rd 1923 in Sidhakatti ,he moved from India to the United Kingdom in 1959. In his life long career as a teacher of history at the University of Sussex, England, Guha (2002) traced disjunctions and insurgencies in World's history. The study looks into the work, *History at the limits of World's History (Guha, 2002)* to find out the reclamation of India's history in the face of discussion..Guha(2002) in his work has traced the trajectory of discursive historicity and questions the historicization in expropriation. The founder of Subaltern studies has challenged Hegel's philosophy of World's history and negates his propagation of providential design of history. He further suggests , Hegel's projection of history as an arbitrary and state oriented phenomenon proves colonization as a justified venture. He contends that history should be free from Euro-centric biases and it should be unchained ,as World's history has closed its eyes upon many colonies under British control just in favor of Eurocentrism. Guha(2002) narrates that Hegel though praised Indian religious and cultural norms but declared India without any history because of the absence of any state. Although Guha's critique(2002) is more closer to Marxist ideology, however his postcolonial underpinnings rests upon poststructuralist approaches and very close to new historicism ,a movement inaugurated by Stephen Greenblatt to prove history

as discourse that can be used and manipulated because every historical work is the product of specific historical movement. The new historicists' theoretical paradigm

Literature Review

The theoretical concerns of new historicism enables literary and non literary texts compliment one another in interpretation. It is deeply rooted in cultural studies as Greenblatt (1986) refers it to be "cultural poetics". So the text is communally shared repertoire of conventions and the institutions and practices of society" (Greenblatt, 1986, p. 12). This approach nullifies the idea given by Coleridge (1983) in *Biographia Literaria* (Coleridge, 1983) that literary creation is a result of divine power of genius but new historicism proposes work of art as "cultural construct". With the inception of this concept both the divinity of the author and conclusiveness of language both were problematized. Since the scientific objectivity of language was questioned with the advent of deconstruction, new historicism conjoins the idea of instability of language and borrowed it from the cultural-political writings of Lyotard (1971) and Gilles Deleuze (1976, 1980). Earlier language was a prime focus. Courthroe (1986) suggests "language is the instrument of thought" and its study "predominate(s) over the study of literature" (Courthroe, 1986, p. 313). However, Montrose's catch phrase, 'the historicity of the text and textuality of history' (Montrose, 1989) proves that language enables us to access the narratives "embedded in particular histories" (Abrams, 1999, p. 183). The concise dictionary of literary terms narrates that New historicism is "breaking down the familiar distinction between a text and its historical 'background' as conceived in established historical forms of criticism." (Baldick, 2005, p. 171). It is evident that new historicism is reflecting post structural and postmodern approaches. But its significance lies in its inclusiveness. Ukkar (2004) notices that new historicist criticism involves "the patterns of conventions, codes and modes of thinking that attribute those meanings to cultural event(s)". (Ukkar, 2004, pp. 22-36). Murray (1999) notes that an author "thickly describes... [and] unearths the underlying meaningful structures of local events and local interactions...." (Murray, 1999, pp. 806-809). These thick descriptions unearths the meaning that is unstable and discursive.

In post-modern premise the poststructuralist approaches endeavor to decenter the essentialist approaches. As structuralism and poststructuralism rest upon language and discourse, history being inscribed in language is also used as an instrument. Michel Foucault (2002) a post-modern proponent in his work *An Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault, 1972) says: "historians have preferred to turn their attention to long periods.... they were trying to reveal the stable, almost indestructible system of checks and balances, the irreversible processes, the constant readjustments, the underlying tendencies that gather force, and are then suddenly reversed after centuries of continuity" (Foucault, 2002, p.3). Foucault's argument (2002) is in the favor of reconstitution he is of the view that discontinuity and rupture are more worthy to be taken into account. He further elaborates the argument by saying that if rupture and discontinuity will not be taken into account the tradition which is lost is not a major discussion but history could be limited and would be deficit on certain grounds so instead of taking into account a monolithic version of history, historians should take into account several pasts and several significant hierarchies. This idea emphatically finds its way in new historicism. Post-colonial critique is replete with such kinds of references in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (Said, 1978) similar stance has been presented. According to Said the depiction of West nullify the position of indigenous identity and formation of "us" and "them" is also working as an agenda: He presents Orientalism as "a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, ... about what 'we' do and what 'they' cannot do" (Said, 1978, p. 12)

In his article *History and Historicity* (Chakrabarty, 2004). Dipesh Chakrabarty (2004) gives the similar idea, in defining Guha's stance (2002) regarding historicity, for

him it is an account "...represented according to one's own set of myriad colorful narratives and multiple realities of concrete human experience" (Chakrabarty, 2004, p.125).

Theoretical Framework

History plays a major role in formulation of identity of any state, nation, community and individual. It is with the advent of Post-structuralism and the postmodern approaches of Michel Foucault, which dismantle the primacy of history and many other metanarratives. In *Madness and Civilization* (Foucault, 1961) and *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault, 1978) Foucault decentered the fundamentalism associated with language and knowledge. He exposed the reality behind discourse and analyzed the relations of knowledge and power. His works "look at the workings of Power" (Foucault, 1984, p. 337) in general. And trace the application of knowledge in "techniques for "governing" individuals - to manipulate their capacities and capabilities for "guiding their conduct" (Foucault, 1984, pp. 337-338). Influenced by Michel Foucault's concept of *episteme* Stephen Greenblatt (1982) analyzed history in this angle, this was a groundbreaking technique which dismantled the metanarrative of history and snatched away divine provision associated with history from the last five centuries. This gives birth to the theoretical stance of new-historicism. Arrived in 1982, the new historicism was announced to be a practice which is "set apart from.....the dominant historical scholarship of the past" (Greenblatt, 1982, p.5). This study finds in new-historicism the similar stance as presented by Guha (2002) in his critique upon history. The study aims to find out the disjunctions Guha (2002) has traced in history and questions the prehistoric and no-history notions, associated with the territories and nations governed by British in order to strengthen hegemonic structures. In *The Power of forms in the English Renaissance* (Greenblatt, 1982) the author narrates the four tenets of his idea. These are; cultural and historical factors of literary production; literary texts as historical representatives; Ideological and temporal interpretation of text and the interaction of history and literature. This study foregrounds the last of all four tenets and explores the interaction of history and literature. Literature and history are two forms of representation, both are interrelated in projection and impact. Hayden White (1986) presents a similar stance that is history as narrative. White (1986) finds in literature and history the narrative stories. White (1986) opines "[n]either the reality nor the meaning of history is "out there" in the form of a story awaiting only a historian to discern its outline and identify the plot that comprises its meaning" (White, 1986, p. 487) The connection between both the genres is suggestive, because literature exposes the power structure that is responsible for shaping the society at certain times. This is how Greenblatt's theoretical stance (1982) proves that power relations are manifestations and reflections of social discourse which he calls 'self-fashioning'. 'Greenblatt's reading of Renaissance era and its fashioning enables him to expose, how power structure distort and manipulate identity with this self-fashioning. This self-fashioning in Greenblatt's views (1982) is incapability of language where it merely involves us into traces of history. A subjective view does involve the cultural power relation and very few are endowed with the opportunity to access larger and powerful cultural patterns. Self-fashioning is a reason of existent historicity and new historicism challenges an idea of selfhood which is narcissist, and mute other voices in favor of one powerful voice. Hence it enables "submission to an absolute power or authority situated at least partially outside the self" (Greenblatt, 1982, p. 9). The sacredness is ultimately associated with it and renders it a position of referential code. Such historicity is "the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society" (Greenblatt, 1982, p. 256). The discursive nature of history is exposed by Greenblatt which problematizes "The Real" and the universal essence related to history by Hegel. According to Hegelian Historicism human history is marked with periodization which started from physical phase to biological one and culminating in human phase, thus its pattern is based upon reason and it is determined on a predetermined trajectory. The ulterior motifs behind this Hegelian conception of World's History are unfolded by Guha (2002) in his exposition. What new-historicism has done as a strategy, Guha (2002) has incorporated in a paradigmatic approach, this interdisciplinary is another landmark of Guha (2002) in Subaltern historiography.

Results and Discussion

The selected work is aimed to locate the historiography of India. Guha(2002) in his book, redresses the expropriation of the history of India ,and attempts to endow India and most specifically the subalterns of India with the status of “the subject of their own history”. For him the significance of this project lies in its idea of self-emancipation. By presenting the World’s history as biased and Euro-centric, the author calls to “...expropriate the expropriators.....in the sense of going to the root of the matter and asking what may be involved in historiography that is clearly an act of expropriation”(Guha,2002,p.2) In order to reveal these implicit biases in elitist history Guha(2002) has taken the concept of World history (*Weltgeschichte*) from Hegel .For Hegel history has teleological basis as it serves a special purpose. By comparing history with the notion of providence in Christianity Hegel declares that history like God’s governance and providence is the part of His plan. Hegel gives history rational basis by projecting the idiosyncratic persona of Giest “world spirit” whose revelation Hegel finds in human consciousness. In order to co-relate providence and state, Hegel executed the culmination of his study in his work, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, (Guha, 2002) writes that Hegel gives a hierarchy which formulates the basis of colonialism and hegemonic structures through expropriation of history. In Hegel: “civil law superseded equals morality, morality superseded equals the family, the family superseded equals civil society, civil society superseded equals the state, and the state superseded equals world history.”(Guha, 2002,p.2-3)

This is how he displaces these entities from their actual place in the concept *Aufhebung*. In this process of history and historicity Guha (2002) has deconstructed the very notion of World History a providential and progressive model of history which has its complete role in colonization regime. By using the world limit Guha (2002) has referred the limitations in the history which is presented before us and suggests that history should be outside “World” .The World(with capital refers to formulations of Eurocentric approaches) which denies the existence of those worlds in the pages of World’s history who were entangled and oppressed in shackles of colonial powers, whose knowledge Guha(2002) has proved is collusive in all fields either it is philology, economics or philosophy, however religion is also included as we see in Hegel the teleologic use of religion as well. So in the World-history in this context seems to rest upon the philosophy and this philosophizing of history inaugurated expropriation for the sake of colonial hegemony. The author counts the deeds of World’s history. He considers that World history is the responsible of “... the rape of continents, the destruction of cultures, the poisoning of the environment”, and it helped “the great men” in Hegel’s words ,in “build[ing] empires and trap their subject populations in what the pseudo-historical language of imperialism could describe as Prehistory”(Guha,2002,p.4).

These claims made history a colonial agent and a tool in the hands of hegemonic powers. Guha (2002) further elaborated the nullification of Indian history by these Eurocentric approaches. In his discussion of history and historification Guha (2002) with a keen eye substantiate its argument in trajectory, he renders the Renaissance of Europe as an identification of “otherness of multitude of races” and points out that in Renaissance Europe started entering into the era of dominance and authority, by using knowledge teleologically and by asserting higher moral values in every sphere either it is religion, culture, values or morality. The trend emerged as a fashion of nullification of others by rendering them without morality, without norms, without values, without cultures and even without history. Guha traces this expropriation and exposed the implicit agenda, he says:

“But it was left to Hegel..... to lay the foundations of a comprehensive philosophy of history with the question of the state at its core. A people or a nation lacked history, he argued, not because it knew no writing but because, lacking as it did in statehood, it had nothing to write about”.(Guha,2002,p.9).

Guha (2002) contends that Hegel's appraisal of Indian traditions, religious customs and cultural norms did not let him make India a part of World's history rather it was excluded from mainstream history. This presentation of deprived nations can rightly be considered victims of imperialistic expansion. Guha (2002) accepts that on the Subcontinent of India this Western perspective on the past was so effectively implied by British colonization that today we can plainly see its progressing and malignant impact. He contends that to bring an end to out of this propensity for mind to forgo the Eurocentric and statist breaking point of World-history those who write history ought to gain from writing to make their stories doubly comprehensive: to broaden them in scope not exclusively to account for the pasts of the purported nations without history yet to address the historicity of regular daily existence too.

Guha (2002) questions the *Statist* accounts of history, He refers to the case of Ramram Basu, who was not a historian but merely an official worker for the East India Company, being charged to compose a history filled with lords of the region of Bengal, in eastern India. Guha narrates that this historical account is further examined by historians and scholars and they trace:

"...that the author allowed his story to lapse occasionally into myth and fantasy; but they all agree that this flaw—almost unavoidable under the circumstances—has done little to undermine the overall authenticity of the work as an exercise in modern, rationalist historiography'(Guha,2002,p.11).

In his deconstruction of Hegel's concept of World's history Guha (2002) has proclaimed the inevitability of pernicious approaches in expansion and dissemination of mainstream historical works in indigenous academia. Chakraberty says that it is evident from Guha's work (2002) that the historiography of India is statist and nation-state centered. By taking into account the statist predicament of South Asian Guha (2002) proposes that "men of genius" are humans and their words should not be considered divine law.

The language is subjective and cannot be devoid of biases and these prejudices never let the situation properly be addressed. So there is always a difference in approaches. This idea is further elaborated by Greenblat (2005) in his *Renaissance Self-fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (Greenblat, 2005). He argues that there is a dynamism and movement in history and it should not be stabilized as the narration is always filled with certain emotions and feelings in it: "the objects of desire, at first so clearly defined, so avidly pursued, gradually lose their sharp outlines and become more and more like mirages" (Greenblat,2005, p.217). The project of subaltern studies focuses upon the history from below. In Guha's critique(2002) on peasant insurgency there is a plea for self-actualization a demand for autonomy in order to get emancipation from the distorted versions of history which did not bother to take into account the role of peasantry in formulation of Indian descent. Even the workings of East India company are highlighted in order to emphasize no notable existence of Indian masses in historical critique of colonized India. Hegel's World History is devoid of participation of India as nation. So discourse is manipulated in formations of history in the fashion of historiography. Guha (2002) suggests in the face of discussion a way out of this hegemony, he proposes to localize history but neither from the perspectives of Western World nor from the side of native Elite, rather he thinks history can best be exhibited in literature, through the eyes of a creative being who can express self, *atma* (in Tagore's terms) through the eye which is able to take into account all the life irrespective of race and creed.

In Guha's discussion of historicity a similar stance is traced. The history in the words of Guha is: "creative engagement with the past as a story of man's being in the everyday world."(Guha, 2002,p.5-6) .This is the essence of Guha's discussion that a historian should attain this model for history. In his epilogue Guha (2002) suggests that Rabindarnath

Tagore's model of history is best to be attained in his writing *Sahitye Aitihāsikata, or Historicality in Literature* (Rabindranath Tagore cited in Guha, 2002). Guha (2002) finds that Tagore has given a right path and a historian must follow the idiosyncratic approach towards history. He chides pedantic historian and his new method for historiography works on the stance "history from below". "All we need to do", Guha (2002) quotes the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre as saying, just as Tagore did, "is to open our eyes and see": advice has been 'ignored by historians these last 60 years'. (Guha, 2002, p.79) One can find in this solution a clarion call for all academic historians to make their histories devoid of Statist approach, histories as play a significant role in shaping a past and formulating the aims for future. Histories thus should be framed in a paradigm which do not formulate histories state-centered, as political agendas cannot fully incorporate daily life experiences the task which can be fulfilled by literature in a far better manner. Montros (1989) an American literary theorist who is associated mostly with new historicist approaches, says that historicality is a dialogue between literature and history. He talks about historicality of texts and textuality of history" (Montros, 1989). This approach ultimately tore down a wall which obstructed the ways of literature to history. Guha's appropriation of historicality and choice of Tagore influenced other followers of Subaltern studies. Dipesh Chakrabarty (1999) presents his *Nationalism and Imagination* (Chakrabarty, 1999) and he takes Tagore's idea of nation in order to frame his study. Gaytri Chakroverty (2003) in her article "Disgrace, Tagore, and Primary Education in West Bengal" (Chakroverty, 2003), Pratha Chattarji (2015) in her lecture at Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta, all talk in way or another about Tagore's ideologies about literature and historicality in one way or another. The study does not involve in a detailed analysis of Tagore, firstly because it would not relate with notion, secondly it needs a full fledged study independently to write upon the stance Tagore has presented in his above mentioned work. What study focuses is the ideology presented by Guha which he discovered from Tagore's writing about the relationship between history and literature. This under discussion work of Guha (2002) is one of his recent critiques in the extension of Subaltern Studies, all his works in one way or another talk about the autonomy of Subalterns and to make them unchained from the shackles of colonization and imperialism. But here in this book we find that the author has questioned historicality and endeavors to rewrite it from the perspective of his people. What we can say an increment is, the incorporation of history and literature. Guha (2002) in his choice of Tagore as a model may also have another plan to execute. Before going into detail Guha's analysis of Tagore's writing (2002), I'll probe commonalities in Guha's analysis of Tagore and one by one another member of Subaltern Studies historiography, Dipesh Chakrabarty (1999). In his article *Nation and Imagination* (Chakrabarty, 1999) the author has discussed Tagore's work in the same context as employed by Guha (2002) in this book. What I trace in Chakrabarty (1999) the same stance of rewriting history from a view which is not biased, prejudiced and teleologically charged. Chakrabarty (1999) has explained by referring to the phrase by Tagore and by putting forth the example of sister Neivedita who used to love India, for her rationality did not hinder it. Chakrabarty (1999) says: "To be able to love India was to go beyond realism, to pierce the veil of the real", (Chakrabarty, 1999, p.150) Similarly for Guha (2002), in order to write the history of India the piercing of the veil is necessary. The historicality of India is under the veil of statist ideology, it could be emancipated by those great thinkers who rely upon their creative transcendentalism rather than thrive upon superiority, privilege and imperialism. For Tagore is also the representative of middle class society and in the translation of his essay we find that Guha (2002) has chosen very homely and ordinary metaphors and symbols to work upon. Which almost discuss the daily life events. Tagore defines a poetics in his article that is developed around a snapshot of revelation or greatness that lifts him out of his ordinary presence into a fellowship with the sublime, which is the embodiment of inventiveness. The very scene of countryside, clouds, sky as it was seen by him (Tagore) could not be seen by anyone else like that, says Guha (2002) in explanation of these lines that: ".....seeing is no longer a passive response to the call of the outside. It is now an instrument of appropriation by which the self has made the world its own". (Guha, 2002, p.81). The very idea refers to the appropriation of historicality

and by presenting Poet's persona in this appropriation Guha (2002) has assigned this responsibility to art and literature. As world is seen by the poet as "mine" there is a sense of association which nullify any kind of intervention of politics, state and hegemonic powers to alter (presentation of) one's life or history. The history which Tagore is going to write does not have any Statist connotations, as literature is about life and social realities of contemporary life, so it would be, according to the author an appropriate representation of history. Tagore's way, according to Guha (2002), is ".....way of situating historicity in a paradigm that seeks to deal with the history of creativity at a depth beyond the academic historian (*aitihasik pandit*) to fathom" (Guha, 2002)

Tagore's use of the word *Itihas* has been cited by Guha (2002) to put it into contrast with the Hegelian concept of history. For Guha (2002) *Itihas* does not let exclusion of Poets and creative writers from history, furthermore it does not let written history to tread upon it or demolish its course. So In order to make one's own history, creativity is another merit, this is the basis for Guha's choice of Tagore's sensibility. And this will formulate *Itihas*, as said by Tagore *Itihas* is:

"weal and woe of human life which, with its everyday contentment and misery, has always been there in the peasants' fields and village festivals, manifesting their very simple and abiding humanity across all of history—sometimes under Mughal rule, sometimes under British rule" (Rabindranath Tagore cited in Guha, 2002, p. 91).

The transcendentalism is dismissed in historicity rather it is a merit of an artist whose writings take into account everyone's life and reality irrespective of race, creed and political ideology.

Conclusion

To cap it all, in postcolonial endeavor there are certain disjunctions which obstruct decolonization to ascertain hegemony. Historicity is a big factor indeed. Being a proponent of subaltern studies project Guha (2002) and his followers raise their voice against the injustice and vulnerability of downtrodden and deprived, however the need of the hour is the rectification of historiography which is working as state apparatus from the time decolonization took place. The selected reading of the book has unveiled the colonial agenda in historicity, In Guha's selection of Hegel as a culprit in historical expropriation has startled the foundations of philosophy and history. Hegelian long held conception of providential aspect of history is appropriately deconstructed by Guha (2002) but his recommendation of Tagore's translation may raise many questions in the face of discussion, if the author like followers of new-historicism intimidate the academic historical accounts in the favor of literature, there may be raised a question to challenge the essentialist position of literature some day. The study remains open ended by proposing the similar proposition as conceived by Spivak in her work *Can Subaltern Speak* (1985) that notion of subalternity will be challenged, if history would be written by those who are still in their subalternity. Hence, there remains no need to call them subalterns any more.

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