

Subaltern Historiography, the Working Class, and Social Theory for the Global South

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The Indian Freedom Movement (1857–1947) was a significant period which had a politically important impact on the Indian state's subsequent formation. The historiography of the movement was until recently much more monochromatic than the movement itself, highlighting the contributions of "great men." The Subaltern Studies Collective (1980s–present) rejected this approach, taking a broader and more productive approach to telling the story of the movement via the bottom-up contributions to Indian history. Surprisingly, however, what became known as Subaltern Studies has downplayed the empirical role of the working class. One reason for this underemphasis is a specific and culturally essentialist mode of appropriating the work of E P Thompson, Carlo Ginzburg, and Hayden White, who are declared influences on Subaltern Studies. Why that was so remains an important question.

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