

Revolution through Rhythm: Anti Caste and Subaltern Dimensions in Indian Rap

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Abstract : Rap music is a popular genre that features strong beats and rhythmic words. It was created by American disc jockeys and urban Black performers in the late 1970s. Additionally, it carries on West African oral traditions that were introduced to the Americas by Africans who were held as slaves and have impacted the narrative and rhythmic components of rap. Initially introduced in India in the late 1990s as mere entertainment, rap lacked the politicized undertones that it developed in the United States. However, recent years have witnessed a transformation, with Indian rap evolving into a vital tool for marginalized communities—particularly Dalits, Muslims, and tribal groups—to voice grievances against historical injustices, systemic discrimination, and caste-based oppression. This paper examines Indian rap's evolution into a potent medium for subaltern resistance, drawing from its origins in the black ghettos of America, where rap emerged as social commentary and an anti-racial political voice. Historically, music has served as an essential medium for subaltern groups in India to assert their identities and reclaim agency. Indian rap, in its current form, amplifies this function by offering a compelling platform to address issues of caste oppression, socio-economic marginalization, and symbolic exclusion. This paper examines how contemporary Indian rappers, often from Dalit and lower-caste backgrounds, leverage their art to confront systemic injustices and amplify voices that have historically been silenced. By analyzing key artists and their lyrics, this paper highlights the ways in which rap critiques the pervasive caste system, challenges social hierarchies, and fosters a sense of identity and solidarity among subaltern groups. This study uses Gayatri Spivak's concept of "strategic essentialism" to explore how Indian rap fosters shared subaltern identity, uniting voices across regional and cultural divides. By situating Indian rap within the global hip-hop movement, the paper highlights how it contributes a unique perspective to global narratives of resilience and resistance, adapting international influences to articulate local struggles. Ultimately, this research highlights Indian rap's role as a catalyst for change, examining its critique of caste violence, economic marginalization, and social exclusion and demonstrating how it contributes to the anti-caste movement. Through a close reading of this subaltern dimension of rap, the paper illuminates how Indian rap fosters identity, solidarity, and resistance, affirming the genre's potential as a transformative force within the global legacy of hip-hop as an expression of subaltern agency and social dissent.

Keywords : caste oppression, hip-hop/rap, resistance, subaltern

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