

Aspects of Resistance

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Abstract

It is a nature of human being to protest when something seems inappropriate. People always raise voice against everything, which seem disparaging and restrict their freedom. They disapprove and condemn if they feel uncomfortable. This disapproval and condemnation of people is termed as ‘resistance’. There are various forms of resistance existing in a society. It may be occurred individually or collectively in the form of rebellion or boycott. This paper is an attempt to study and to theorize the concept of resistance in a very comprehensive way. It is an effort to unravel its various forms and types existing in a society. It would be helpful to understand its multiple meanings and connotations prevalent in all disciplines.

Keywords: Resistance, Discrimination, Freedom, Subjugation, Domination

Resistance is defined as a tendency of struggle against something which seems hostile and disparaging to human being and society. It is a kind of rebellion and fight against dominant structure which bears a state of society where there is conflict of values and outlooks, about how to live. It arises out of human beings’ tendencies of domination, suppression, oppression, subjugation, and marginalization vis-à-vis counter-tendencies of freedom, dignity, and fulfillment. Usually, it is taken as a negative term related with refusal and interpreted as a force that opposes the seemingly natural flow of events in human history. Nevertheless, it also has progressive and productive implications. Apart from its compassion for the marginalized and oppressed, it also favors multiplicity and heterogeneity in the process of providing space for freedom and justice for all human beings (Jain 21).

The term ‘Resistance’ has originated from Latin root, *resistentia*, derived from the verb *resiste’re* meaning to “hold back,” or stand against, and implies incessant efforts to interrogate existing dominant structures in society. It is an expression of people’s disinclination and disapproval towards any particular notion which disrepute human life in one way or the others. It is a feeling of disappointment that inspires people to raise voice against prevalent injustices in

the society. It stands against prevailing dominant structures which not only tries to seek new amendments but also reacts against unwanted changes for further growth. It can also be described as a mode of bringing substantive reforms to keep the environment good and healthy for all sections of society. It also deals with disaffection of people, their anger against prevailing norms of society and embodies fight to win a space for ignored sections. It emphasizes people's desire to live lives full of self-determination and respect for all human beings (Lopez and Marzec (677-679)).

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines 'resistance' as 'dislike' or 'opposition' to a plan or an idea, etc.; refusal to obey. Thus, it expresses feelings of disagreement and disenchantment in various ways. It challenges all the strategies and approaches which appear inappropriate in the social arena. Hence it provokes a sense of disagreement and dissatisfaction to bring some innovative changes in the existing structure of society. It questions and intervenes all the standardized norms which stir even an individual life. Thus, individuals always tend to protest and resist against everything which is not liked by them. They raise voice and criticize the existing practices prevalent in the society for better changes. They register their complaints individually as well as collectively through newspapers or letters and even resist against the unwanted changes imposed by the social authorities. Sometimes they organize public meetings to make others aware to achieve this goal (Jasper 5). It demands proper equilibrium which means equal opportunity to all sections of society. Scholars have been trying to define the term 'Resistance' in various ways. They tend to use it as a reflection of wide variety of actions and behaviours of human beings in a particular society which might be influenced individually, collectively or even institutionally based on different political settings and culture and social backgrounds. It is conceived as "acting autonomously in [one's] own interests" "active efforts to oppose, to fight, and refuse to cooperate with and submit with . . . abusive behaviour and . . . control" engaging in behaviours despite opposition, "questionings and objecting". Thus, it is defined variously (Hollander and Einwohner 534)

Webster's New World College Dictionary includes four definitions of 'resistance': a) "The act of resisting, opposing, withstanding, etc.;" b) "Power or capacity to resist;" (c) "Opposition of some force . . . to another or others;" and d) "A force that retards, hinders, or opposes motion" The first of these four definitions refer to resistance as a behavioral outcome, the act of withstanding influence. The other three refer to more motivational aspects of resistance, as a power or oppositional force. It is defined as reaction against unwanted changes. It is apparently clear through the expression of pressure for change (Knowles and Linn 4).

It is precisely clear from dictionaries' meanings that resistance has a lot to do with refusal and disobedience. It interrogates hierarchal and normative ideals of society and looks forward to

having essential shifts but also fight to preserve unsolicited changes. It bears a sense of denial and defy against complicated structure to have rather suitable atmosphere.

In literature, term 'Resistance' was first applied in a description of Palestinian literature in 1966. Palestinian writer and critic Ghassan Kanafani was the first to apply the term in his study *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948-1966* (Harlow 2). Barbara Harlow's book *Resistance Literature* (1987) introduced the political role of literature in armed struggles. Apart from socio-economic control and cultural domination the struggle for national liberation and independence produced "a significant corpus of literary writing, both narrative and poetic, as well as a broad spectrum of theoretical analysis of the political, ideological and cultural parameters of this struggle" (Harlow xvi). At times, resistance also includes opposition to maltreatment and hegemonic prejudices that standardize the individualities of subaltern groups. It is quite explicit that resistance and domination are interwoven, as both are associated with power. Power always provokes resistance. One cannot go without other. Where there is power there is resistance and visa-versa (Foucault 95). Further Foucault says that an individual is both "subjugated" and "constituted" through power. Hence it is crucial to know about the sets of power relations in social arena to understand the diverse and heterogeneous forms of resistance. Since Power is operated according to the nature of resistance, it becomes crucial to understand power and resistance together (Lilja and Vinthagen 108). Foucault in his book *Discipline and Punishment* asserts that the nature of "power is ubiquitous and all-encompassing" and cannot be confined into certain boundaries. It is spread worldwide. It is power which provokes someone to resist against something (Pickett 445). Resistance leads power to be exercised accordingly its nature and vice versa. Thus, both power and resistance become inseparable chips of same coin. He urges that "The generality of the struggle specifically derives from the system of power itself, from all the forms in which power is exercised and applied." (Pickett 456).

Moreover, Foucault says that the nature of power is "hierarchical and in-egalitarian" whereas resistance is "horizontal conjunctions" and inequality is an indispensable component of power therefore resistance in its absence of hierarchy is called "counter-power". He does not see power only as destructive force rather sees power as creative force. Similarly, he says that resistance is not merely a "negation of power or antimatter" rather productive strength. Therefore, both power and resistance can alter the lifestyle of an individual at particular time, and place if it works as a productive mechanism for the marginalized sections of society (Pickett 459). Thus, it questions tyrannical power structure and interrogates prevalent injustices under those structures. In other words, resistance tries to seek sense of justice and freshness in society. It is a kind of protest against various sorts of prejudices and perceptions which hinders an expression of independence and integrity. It stands in favour of an individual and groups as well. Moreover, it assists marginalized and oppressed sections of society to reform and re-establish the present order (Bande 1-4). Apart from this history provides numerous evidences of struggle for

survival. Different tactics of power and resistance have been developed, explored, rejected, refined and reinvented too. During this course of historical development, it is obvious that neither power nor resistance turns victorious. Thus, both exist as temporary tendencies with an incessant and never ending struggle. They are regarded as the two sides of same coin.

Foucault and Certeau argue that both power and resistance have “dynamic relationship”. One arises out of other and further both react against each other which leads never ending struggle (Vinthagen and Johansson 28). Resistance also emerges out of dominant tendency. Its stand against domination leads power to be exercised accordingly. The prominent resistance scholar James Scott in his book *Domination and Arts of Resistance* argues that power always influences resistance, and its forms are always guided by the way power is exercised which simultaneously tends to limit these different forms. He views that “riots”, “social movement”, “political parties and withdrawal” are some distinct forms of resistance in society (Vinthageon and Johanssoan 44). Further Scott talks about class resistance and defines it as “any act(s) by member(s) of a subordinate class that is or are *intended* either to mitigate or deny claims (for example, rents, taxes, prestige) made on that class by superordinate classes (for example, landlords, large farmers, the state) or to advance its own claims (for example, work, land, charity, respect) vis-à-vis those super-ordinate classes”. Hence one can see that resistance can arise from class struggle which shakes the conservative roots of social settings. Where there is class struggle there will be resistance (Scott 290). In addition to literary studies resistance has occupied many other disciplines such as “Sociology, Cultural Studies, Anthropology, Women Studies and Political Science” etc. This swift growth of scholarship on resistance is both productive and stirring. Many authors might not have the same views as well as the same language of resistance. It has also been used to describe a wide range of action and behaviors at all levels of human life in different sets like literature, political system, entertainment, and other workplace. In fact, everything from “hairstyles” to “revolutions” has been termed as resistance (Hollander and Einwohner 534).

Hence it can be defined in various ways, e.g., acting independently according to one’s own interest without any interference, continuous efforts to oppose, not to cooperate with or simply complaining and questioning, seeking new changes but to preserve unwanted changes, to dislike something, to develop sense of independent consciousness in society, to protest against tyrannical structure etc. Act of resistance might be collective or individual according to different situations and locations. One will find different forms of resistance according to the factors like what “social structure” it resists and the “form of power relation”. Moreover, it differs depending on the “social space; social category” and the “size” and “power of that social category” (Vinthagean 9) It can be centered on “local” as well as “worldwide” issues which guide to hold different sets of targets and carries the sense of encounter, opposition, rebellion, challenge, disagreement, change, rejection and so on (Hollander and Einwohner 534-536). Many other

authors express their views that “breaking of silence” and to “keep silence” is also an undeniable form of resistance. Not only to speak against oppression and seeks changes at any levels but also to hold silence is an important form of resistance. Some people tend to be silent against oppression and bear all the atrocities. Their silence remains as symbol of protest. Whereas many other people raise voice break their silence to resist against (Hollander and Einwohner 536).

Resistance also emanates out of feelings of frustration and uncertainty. However, this is a never ending phenomenon which tends to go on because all the situations and circumstances of subjugation instigate people to resist. It motivates to challenge all dominant and authoritarian rules which obstruct social, economic, and political progress. Thus, resistance exposes irrationality and obstinacy of power and envisages its adverse results. It inculcates a sense of conviction and encourages feelings of integrity towards community and nation. It brings up ideas of justice and equality, which tends to protect us from unwanted encroachment in life. At the same time ‘Resistance’ as a term not only aims to bring novelty but also to unravel oppression and discrimination hidden under the layers of habits of thought and actions. Its theoretical dimensions remove the cobwebs which prevent us from understanding the nature of reality. It is a struggle to bring about the meanings which can be sustained and preserved in us and which render human life more beautiful and less conflicted (Jain 9-17).

Certain individuals and groups consider resistance to be an anti-social attitude, destructive of order, and progenitor of violence, which spreads feelings of insecurity in the society. In various art forms resistance indicates that society is not stagnating, and constant struggle is there to continuously rejuvenate it. It is a reminder or caution to people to resurrect their often forgotten cultural and social values such as freedom, beauty, and love. These values motivate us to remain alert both morally and intellectually (Jain 8). It is quite clear that the term ‘resistance’ has multiple meanings such as to protest, propagandize, assert, boycott, seek change, oppose, counter, fight against, raise voice, refuse to obey, agitate, create discomfiture, challenge, campaign and react against injustice, inequality, and violation of basic human rights. Hence it is an integral part of human society. It is an evolution which brings up new ideas to people’s mind. It works very contrarily for every human being and brings up different results. We react to it with our own particular worldview, and understanding from our own history, location, class, religion, caste and ideology. Neither the term nor the responses to it can be defined precisely in a specific way. It cannot be classified or confined neatly. It is perhaps an act of living and worthier part of social life to retain a kind of positive equilibrium between opposing forces of extremism. It is essential for history to evolve and policies to be introspected. It tries to connect our everyday life with wider issues of power and globalization. It influences creative ideas and ideologies and helps to explain the role of intellectualism in human life (Jain xvi). As an agency of change ‘resistance’ is not of contemporary origin. Its root can be traced since the dawn of human civilization. It has influenced different disciplines like Cultural Studies, Anthropology, Women

Studies, Political Science, Humanities, Social sciences, and off course Pure Sciences. All the attempts taken for the sake of changes under different discipline in the form of movement, revolution, boycott, protest, interrogation, challenge, opposition, disagreement, disapproval termed as resistance. For instance, Buddhist questioning of hegemonic structure of caste in India, Aristotle's disagreements with his teacher Plato (Jain 17) and later Dryden's opposition of Aristotle's definition of literature can be termed as resistance because of their disagreement to each other. Apart from this Peasants' revolt of 1381 in England, Reformation and Renaissance movement, John Donne's disagreements with Petrarchan's philosophy of love, Romantic poets' revolt against Neo-classical traditions are some famous examples of disagreement and protest against the existing structure.

In Indian history there are so many examples of protest and opposition. Social Reformers Raja Ram Mohan, Roy Vidyasagar, Govind Ranade had always worked for the betterment of the society. They opposed everything which created havoc in the society. They always raised voices against the atrocious activities done with women and children and cried for better changes. Later Indian Mutiny in 1857, Mahatma Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement, Non-Alignment Movement and Quit India Movement clearly indicate towards Indian people resistance against British's oppression and exploitation. French revolution in 1789 against monarchy and dictatorship for the sake of democracy, brotherhood, fraternity and equality and Russian revolution in 1817 are two strong evidences of people's wrath and resistance against the existing structures which shake the whole world.

Civil Rights Movement during 1960s in the history of America is one of prominent examples of people's resistance against the existing dominant structure. It was a movement of black people against White's dominance which demanded equality for all black people in America. Its major goal was to secure legal rights for Afro-Americans. In Afro-American literature Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Neal Zora Hurston are some prominent authors who raised voice against white people's atrocities. They actively took part in civil rights movements and sought justice for deprived black people in America. Similarly, Dalit literature raises voice against atrocities of upper castes. Feminist movements' struggles against exploitations and discrimination prevalent in patriarchal society—are all vivid instances of individual and collective forms of resistance. They all look for changes that lead to emancipation and liberation from oppressive traditions and the establishment of an egalitarian society.

Conclusion

To conclude, one can say that resistance has multiple meanings. It cannot be confined in single words. It is an inseparable part of human life. It provokes sense of integrity and freedom from all the restrictions. There are numerous causes of its occurrences in a society. It arises out of tendencies of domination, oppression and subjugation. Discrimination is also one of the most

predominant causes of resistance in society. It is a feeling of discouragement that leads to protest to have equal opportunities for all. Where there is discrimination there will be resistance.

It challenges dominant structure and demands certain changes to live with dignity. But it also occurs if authorities try to impose unwanted changes in a society. Human beings resist if someone tries to impose unsolicited changes and subjugate them. There is none who accepts subjugation in this democratic era. Furthermore, there are various types of resistance like political, economic, cultural, and social. It takes place in the form of disagreement, boycotts, tendency of counter-attack, to raise slogan, etc. It raises its voice against prevalent injustice, which becomes hindrance in the path of development. It seeks to maintain proper equilibrium, which is necessary to have sound economic growth and cultural advancement.

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