

“On Defining an Intellectual: The Postcolonial Chapter”

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ABSTRACT

One of the most commonly heard, used or debated concept and term that one comes across, yet very little understood and the importance of which barely grasped, is the term ‘intellectual’. Who is an intellectual? The question exposes itself to multitude of responses – at times appropriate, ambiguous, contradictory, relevant, invalid, or even vague. Any attempt at defining who an intellectual is brings up the general impossibility to reach a universally acceptable valid definition since “an intellectual cannot fit into any role that might be assigned to him, nor can he ever be made fit into any of the histories written,” for the very reasons that define him as one who should “constantly disturb, should bear witness to the misery of the world, should be provocative by being independent, should rebel against the hidden and open pressure and manipulations, should be the chief doubter of systems, of power and its incantations, should be a witness to their mendacity.”¹ In most of the definitions given of an intellectual, what is actually defined is the role or function that an intellectual is supposed or expected to play and perform in society. Despite the fact that no objective and universal prototype of an intellectual can be clearly chalked out, when put in a larger and a more broader perspective a common set of generalities emerges even with the varied elucidations and interpretations from approaches which define intellectuals differently based on their respective focus and the formulation of a definition depends on the context it is used in and the thematic field within which it emerges. The present paper is an attempt to analyse the various definitional parameters set for an intellectual in the context of contemporary times.

Keywords: *Post-colonialism, neo-imperialism, , intellectual activism, dissent, resistance*

INTRODUCTION

Over the ages, scholars and academicians have attempted to define an intellectual in various ways and from different perspectives. Their inferences and implications are sometimes seen confined to immediate milieu or go beyond the immediate to represent universal ideas and ideals. All the views on intellectuals grapple with the problematics of reaching a definition that rises above ideologies and politics. It is indeed difficult to reach a unanimously acceptable and universally valid definition of an intellectual since “an intellectual cannot fit into any role that might be assigned to him, nor can he ever be made fit into any of the histories written” (Havel: 167). With changing times and evolving power relations, definitions, roles and functions of intellectuals have kept changing. Hinting at the multiplicity of functions and roles that intellectuals perform, Said points out there is no “master plan or blueprint or grand theory for what intellectuals can do” (2002: 36). Such multiplicity

¹Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*, New York: Knopf, 1990, p. 167.

only serves to underline the difficulties of defining the intellectual through their stances taken for public in their writings. Intellectuals, however, often get defined through the social context of their actions. Their postulations are born out of a desire for social change and transformation. The present paper attempts to give a general overview of what it means to be an intellectual for the contemporary times by analysing the various theoretical postulations of an intellectual in the twenty and the twenty-first century

The term “intellectual” signifies different attributes in different societies and in different ages. The French refer to intellectuals as thinkers who advocate deism, scientific rationality and ideology. The Russian intelligentsia is that class of educated elites who act as committed and revolutionary agents of cultural transformation. In Eastern and Central Europe, intellectuals denoted liberals, socialists and other critics of authority. The American view on intellectuals is that of someone who believes in free exchange of ideas. The Persian *rowshanfekran* epitomizes the role of intellectuals as the most concerned, searching, reflective, and attentive observers of cultural revolution. They are the channels of progressive change who invariably represent the discontented masses. In the Arab-Islamic world, the terms *muthaqqaf* and *mufakir* are used to refer to intellectuals. *Muthaqqaf* (derived from the word *thaqafa* i.e. culture) means a man of culture and *mufakir* (derived from *fikr* i.e. thought) means a man of thought. In the racially discriminated African world, intellectuals represent the moral high point of resisting and challenging apartheid and socio-cultural hegemonies. The pre-eminent aim of theorizations of intellectuals has been to “align intellectuals with an emerging historic movement” (Hall 1996: 267).

Through different times, intellectuals have shown willingness to aid in revolutionary activities and transformation of social, economic and political structures, and to simultaneously break down oppression and subjugation to achieve freedom and equality. There has always been a sharp social and political purpose to the voice of intellectuals, who have struggled for recognition and representation of interests of popular classes and civil society. “The very creation of an ‘intellectual-moral bloc’ of scholars and public intellectuals affirms the existence of a temporal structure underlying historical conjunctures” (Gramsci 2000: 333). In ancient societies, shamans and fortune tellers were often considered to be on a higher “intellectual” plane than others. Robert J. Brym observes that “even a nomadic tribe of fewer than 100 forages could afford to employ a shaman” (277) given the fact that they were seen to be intellectuals. The ancient Greek tradition relied solely on the idea that intellectual is the critical conscience of every society and representative spokesman who acts as the guardian of truth and justice for all. The classical image of the intellectual is that of someone who is ascribed the function of seer and shaper of outlooks. He is assigned the role of a prophet expected to simplify the truths about the world and about ourselves. Greeks saw philosophers and polymaths as intellectuals. Through the Middle Ages, intellectuals were seen as people who questioned tyranny and authoritarianism especially emanating from religion and monarchical states. They were the forerunners of a new spirit and a new world view that culminated in the age of Renaissance and Reformation. In relation to truth, justice, liberty, freedom and the progress of knowledge, the commitment of intellectuals brought mankind from dark ages into the age of enlightenment. Over time Classical values and ideals were retained but there developed an ever increasing passion for inquiry and progress.

Intellectuals represented those who sought freedom from mental strictures and sought general emancipation particularly freedom and individual expression. During advanced industrialization and capitalism, intellectuals came to represent those with the moral responsibility of working towards social and civil justice. They advocated peace as a social reconstruct and revolted against the onslaughts of excessive materialism and modern ideological enslavement to capital. In the postcolonial era, intellectuals were primarily involved in the critique of all kinds of colonisation whether the misuse of power, exploitation, colonial alienation, or social, political and cultural erosion. The post-emancipation era saw the persistent struggle of intellectuals to deconstruct the colonial perceptions and attitudes of power and oppression that existed prior to political emancipation. In the process, they invariably aimed at re-carving identities. In the recent times, the newly emerging vociferous participants of public life try to reflect on the experience of recent generations while at the same time re-interpreting the notions of nationalism, secularism, democracy, humanism, globalization and advancement. These new intellectuals often advocate action-oriented radical stances and positions. In their involvement in contemporary struggles, they show a modified commitment through novel methods of registering opinions. The transitional activism from contemporary intellectuals highlights “the uncanny repetition and parodic mimesis of a pre-existing condition” (Mitchell: 105).

“Long memories of earlier, unsettled cultural and political movements live on in the anxious incompletions of contemporary protests and insurrections. The Arab spring and Occupy Wall Street are not devoid of the traces of collective movements.” (Bhabha: 8)

Today, the representation of an intellectual has become complex since intellectual activity has not remained restricted to books, scholarly articles, newspapers, journals, writings, speeches or interventions in academics, politics, corporate mass media and journalism. It finds platform even in chat-room talks, social networking sites, independent blogs, and road side performances and graffiti. Technological advancement and digital revolution has made vast platforms available for individuals to register opinion over issues concerning present pluralistic globalized societies. The traditional reliance and fixity on writing has been replaced, and social documentaries, web blogs and a wide variety of cultural productions have become hallmarks of intellectual debates and discussions in the present digitized order. Despite the lack of legitimization in proper mainstream theory and practice of intellectualism, these new modes of public participation in intellectual activism continue unabated.

The modern intellectual emerged with the famous Dreyfus Affair¹ that began in 1894 and continued till the early years of 1900s. Dreyfus affair was a unique social unrest in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when a French Army captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jew, was convicted in 1894 of selling military secrets to Germans. National passions fuelled by efforts of anti-Semitic groups, supported the conviction. When it was revealed that the French Army may have engaged in a cover up of information which could have exonerated Dreyfus, a public debate emerged between two groups. One group was of those defending the establishment and included church clerics, conservatives and anti-Semites. They aligned in support of the government. The opposing group was that of the Dreyfusards who supported Dreyfus vigorously. The Dreyfusards continued to

agitate for reconsideration of the Dreyfus decision. It was particularly the appearance of Emile Zola's (1840-1902) *J'Accuse* in a newspaper that raised a smouldering public discussion on the incident and the merits of the case. Zola stood in defence of Dreyfus and against the army's injustice and government's complicity. In 1906, after a huge public intellectual support for the cause of justice, Dreyfus was pardoned after a second court martial. It is believed that the Dreyfus trial led to the widespread usage of the term intellectual. With this incident the idea of justice within a society of equity gained popular support in form of dissenting voices. There is a general consensus among scholars that the events of France in late nineteenth and early twentieth century did, in fact, make the role of public intellectual prominent.

The event holds importance in the emergence of the modern intellectual as it marked a watershed that questioned the legitimacy of the actions of present nation states and defended the idea of justice and liberty. The incident demanded a political system responsible and responsive to people and stressed on the revival of civil accountability, public conscience and participation in mainstream intellectual life. More importantly it showed how difficult it was for intellectuals to distance themselves from issues of public concern. The incident served to assert that public conscience and power can be used as intellectual tools to question and challenge the state apparatuses and injustices in the pursuit of justice. One important attribute of the age that followed the rise of French intellectuals was the rebellious nature of intellectual activism that established an intellectual as someone who is anti-establishment, resilient and radical social and cultural critic. His main aim and function got redefined in terms of defending society and humanity from the effects of the socio-political order which demerits, delimits and devalues human existence. The fight against oppression became paramount to all intellectual activism. In the backdrop of a century that began with strong caution against the thwarting of civil liberties, the postcolonial interrogation of the term intellectual brings one to the definitional parameters set by such socio-political commentators as Antonio Gramsci, Noam Chomsky, Edward Said.

In Ralph Waldo Emerson's (1803-1947) *The American Scholar*, one man or man thinking correlates with the tradition of modern intellectuals. Emerson defines his one man or man thinking as a scholar who has an obligation to see the world clearly. He is guided by the ideas of the past and has a strong and independent voice. He relies on wisdom derived from practical learning and action and not by abstract learning. Emerson's one man possesses the intellectual ethics and values prescribed by the Classics. Thus, Emerson tries to define the intellectual as an independent thinker who embodies all dimensions of human potential and actuality. Emerson's aim was to awaken the American scholars from complacency and his delineation of the intellectual catered to the need of that particular time and society. But his perspectives could very well be used to define intellectuals in general and universal terms. Thomas Molnar, while formulating the definition of an intellectual, distinguishes him from philosophers, scholars, scientists, researchers, writers and artists. He essentially focuses on an intellectual's use of mental ability, education, articulateness, creativity and experience to some political and social use, "not satisfied with interpreting the events – of economic, social, practical nature – around himself, but tries to influence and transform them" (Molnar: 8). Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) assigned the role of educators and advisors to the intellectuals whose "function is to help contemporaries understand themselves through their ideas and their feelings rather than to govern them". He basically "was isolating an instrumentalist

role for the intellectual-cum-sociologists he saw as decisive in his project of social renewal and development” (Wilke and Mohan: 50). In sociological function, the task of intellectuals is mainly to respond to power and politics that inform every society. Intellectuals are “persons with advanced educations, producers or transmitters of culture or ideas, or members of either category who engage in public issues” (Kurzman and Owens: 63). They have the responsibility to stand up for the people and against all systems of oppression and oppose a status-quo by resisting old and outdated ideologies. An intellectual should “constantly disturb, should bear witness to the misery of the world, should be provocative by being independent, should rebel against the hidden and open pressure and manipulations, should be the chief doubter of systems, of power and its incantations, should be a witness to their mendacity” (Havel: 167). Carl L. Harter, while defining intellectuals, places them in the domain of power-roles whereby they exercise influence in public spheres. Intellectuals as defined by him “in power-roles act as advisors (experts) and expressers. As advisors and experts they communicate to policy makers and public. As expressers they mainly serve as critics with little responsibility for practical affairs” (48).

Michel Foucault’s (1926-1984) conception of an intellectual was that of the disturber of people’s mental habits. An intellectual is always involved in asking and posing questions rather than answering them or shaping the political will of common people. Foucault rejected the process of politicization of intellectuals. He classified intellectuals into two - the universal intellectual and the specific intellectual. Universal intellectuals, according to Foucault, were involved in offering universal truths based upon their analysis of the universal history. Foucault’s use of universal intellectuals was derived from the idea of “jurist or notable”, the “man of justice, the man of law”, who counter poses all abuses of power and wealth with “the universality of justice and the equity of an ideal law” (Foucault: 126). But as the requirement of times changed, intellectuals too were obliged to work, theorize and practice in specific locations of new experiences and knowledge. These new intellectuals, whom Foucault favours, are the specific intellectuals. They deal with problems specific to their times and locations. “As intellectuality situates itself in material circumstances, the new realistic age of specific intellectuals has replaced the delusional age of universal intellectuals” (Foucault: 126). Power relations and politics form the basis of every social aspect and Foucault simply meant to invoke people to act as agents of social change themselves without relying on others to tell them so. In his outright rejection of the universal intellectuals, he emphasises the need for intellectuals to distance themselves from this role of prophesying. Universal intellectuals use their knowledge and position to justify guiding others, therefore, Foucault prefers intellectuals who do not make universal claims and instead work in specific and precise contexts that they find themselves in. As an instance Foucault proposes that they have to encourage local struggles within workplaces “not in the modality of the ‘universal’, the ‘exemplary’, the ‘just-and-true-for-all’ but within specific sectors, at the precise points where their own conditions of life and work situate them” (Foucault: 126). He opined that the oppressed, dominated and exploited people don’t need intellectuals to tell them their plight as they are themselves perfectly well aware of it. They need knowledge and guidance in navigating the domination of institutional powers from the intellectuals. In the manner of Foucault, therefore, intellectuals are the individuals who should simply deploy their technical competence to aid the oppressed.

Similar to Foucault's views on intellectual are those of Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995), a contemporary of Foucault and an ardent proponent of the specialised intellectuals. Like Foucault, he rejected the notion of intellectuals as the bearers of universal truth and their role of speaking for others. According to Deleuze, an intellectual merely muffles the ability of underprivileged classes to speak by speaking on their behalf. It becomes an imposition of his views onto them in much the same way as bourgeois society imposed its ideologies onto them. These classes, thus, become doubly victimised by the capitalist society as well as the intellectuals. The Persian scholar Mehrzad Boroujerdi (1962--) has similar definition and classification of an intellectual as Foucault and Deleuze. He classifies intellectuals in two groups– the socially engaged visionaries and the instrumental-bureaucratic functionaries and professionals. The first class of intellectuals “use critical discourse to echo and instigate demands, question and criticise social problems, and finally, lead and represent the discontented masses,” and the second class of intellectual “oversees gradual and orderly change and legitimizes the authority of political elites” (Boroujerdi: 21). He acknowledges the presence of the instrumental-bureaucratic intellectuals who possess universal appeal and traditional superior-objective knowledge. He assigns significant role to the new intellectuals, who with the onset of modernity have managed to encroach upon social space of the traditional intellectuals and delimit their role. As a new social stratum, these intellectuals have managed to secure for themselves the role of interpreters of the world, producers of the collective conscience and channels of secular and progressive change.

Max Weber (1864-1920) defined intellectuals as a group of people “who by virtue of their peculiarity have special access to certain achievements considered to be ‘culture values’ and who therefore usurp the leadership of a ‘culture community’” (176). Weber belonged to that group of scholars whose public role was theoretically oriented to *realpolitik*. He assumed a clear separation between the sphere of the mind and the sphere of power, defending the ideology that intellectuals are not competent in public matters. In his essays “*Politik als Beruf*” and “*Wissenschaft als Beruf*” Weber argues that most intellectual activity centred around public and political life assumes intellectuals to possess a particular form of personal responsibility often demanded by vocation of politics. A scholar's role doesn't demand or facilitate such a responsibility. Despite Weber's contention, the understanding of the term intellectual through different times has relied primarily on intellectual's function in a society. To be an intellectual one has to be involved in human history not just personal ones for making contributions to society and human race as Christiane Landsiedel puts it:

“Intellectuals are those educated people (institutionally educated or autodidactically) who contribute in different ways and to varying degrees to the production and development of cultural goods - in the form of speech, books, music, paintings or sculptures. Intellectuals can be writers, musicians, artists, philosophers, social scientists, clergymen etc. whose expert knowledge and exceptional capacity of critical reflection substantiate their minority status.” (15)

Intellectuals were basically considered to be those who use general intelligence as the main source of their contribution. It implied that intellectuals are those people who are involved in non-manual work (teachers,

doctors, academicians, lawyers etc.) as opposed to manual labour. But with the changing times intellectual activity got detached from mentally specialised and specific social strata. Intellectuals belong to “the broader community of ‘intelligentsia’ who are engaged in generation, dissemination, interpretation and critical examination of ideas...segment of society which by its basic nature is supposed to play a directional role. Intellectuals have always been expected to be ‘moral guardians’, conscience keepers’, anti-establishment’, ‘harbingers of new ideas and practices’ and ‘prophets’. Hence they are supposed to be imbued with qualities and capabilities of insight, hindsight, far sight and foresight” (Sharma and Vir: 277-78). Their involvement in the issues of society is deeply motivated by the self-realisation that their contribution is necessary. Thus the intellectual is “the man devoted to the spirit, who thus devoted, thus legitimated rationally analyses his society, his shudder stayed by his faith that his fellowmen are, as he is, endowed with reason” (Wolff: 116). They provide “critique, analysis and explication, whether of politics or culture,” (Kauffman: 131) having a shared objective of describing what is really happening in our culture. They are the individuals who “make sense of our collective life” (Jennings and Kemp-Welch: 114). They produce ideas and arguments, and initiate debates and discussions. And by use of wisdom and foresight they apply their intellect and forward-looking visions for the purpose of awakening society. They are the people who write or speak well on issues of broad public concern ranging from culture, politics, morality, ethics, economics, race, gender, or environment.

Stanislav Andreski (1919-2007), in his definition of intellectuals, distinguishes between intellectuals as “inquirers” and intellectuals as “exhorters” (201). Inquirers are intellectuals whose judgements are based on facts and exhorters are the intellectuals whose judgements are based on values. Karl Mannheim (1893-1947) defines intellectuals as the new intelligentsia having a responsibility of truthfulness and towards truth. An intellectual is a person who indulges in all social issues with a commitment towards truth and validity. However, while defining intellectuals, Mannheim stresses on the significance of autonomy and independence of an intellectual. It is this autonomy and independence that project intellectuals as being relatively objective. He describes intellectuals as vigilant critics who are disengaged from power politics. He attributes this autonomy to the conditions of modern times. “From a sociological point of view the decisive fact of modern times is that...in place of a closed and thoroughly organised stratum of intellectuals, a free intelligentsia has risen” (Mannheim: 10). Such an understanding of an intellectual that stresses the significance of autonomy has found mention variedly in other critics as well like Julien Benda’s idealized intellectual who is distant from material concerns and the lonely condition of Edward Said’s intellectual. They, too, consider autonomy to be the basic premise of intellectualism because “an intellectual’s responsibility to truth can only be exercised if the intellectual stands apart and detached from the society in which he or she operates”(Jennings and Kemp-Welch: 10). If an intellectual is to act as an interpreter with an authority to adjudicate on issues concerning society, his position has to be that of an objective observer and critic. His legitimized knowledge should not be influenced by anything. Autonomy empowers him to act as the conscience of the society and articulate the voice of the oppressed and the marginalised that are caught up in the socio-political expressional regimes. Societal criticism thus becomes their major role which they perform as detached free individuals by maintaining a rigorous independence of mind.

Romila Thapar (1931--) in her lecture "To Question or Not to Question?", which was later published in the anthology *The Public Intellectual in India* (2015), draws attention towards the presence and role of intellectuals in contemporary times. She tries to show how intellectuals objectively and fearlessly use their constructive voice for ensuring proper functioning of a country whose hallmarks have to be social and economic equality, justice for all and liberty. While drawing a relation between authority and knowledge to define intellectual, Thapar stresses that it is important to have independent voices to protect the underprivileged. It is these voices that ensure human rights and social justice and watch over the smooth working of our secular, liberal democracies. In her definition of an intellectual, she places high premium on knowledge especially new knowledge that always opposes existing orthodoxies and well established authorities. Stressing on the primacy of reasoned, logical argument in explaining the world around, Thapar takes recourse to history where she finds the roots and essence of the intellectualism in the act of asking questions. "Whether it was Socrates or Cicero, intellectuals always claim the right to question whatever needs to be questioned especially in matters concerning the civil society" (Thapar: 3). In her formulation regarding intellectuals, Thapar asserts that by questioning conventional knowledge and practice and its effects on the institutions of society, philosophers and intellectuals have always tried to question and challenge power. Intellectuals have always relied on reasoned analysis to criticize social functioning and also to seek changes in society wherever necessary. She draws examples from both European and Indian traditions to highlight the presence of rational heritage of criticism, causality and rational explanations in intellectuals across time and across cultures. Socrates, Locke, Hume, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau from West; and Buddha, Aryabhata, Akkamahadevi, Mira, Amir Khusrau, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Serfoji II, Jyotiba Phule from India have all contributed to intellectual traditions by questioning existing paradigms "as a means of attaining an improved society" (14). Despite diversity of such intellectuals all of them reflect the necessity of taking strong positions in favour of social justice and equality against the onslaughts of power and authority. For intellectuals "the commitment of speaking on point, to writing punctually, or to forming an alliance or collaboration- despite historical happenstance- is an ethical imperative" (Hall 1996: 267) from which they cannot absolve themselves. The most important role they play by questioning is to use their free thought to invoke people to be critical and reflective. By raising matters of broad public concern, they provoke the society to introspect and retrospect to bring about change. In the contemporary, neo-liberal culture and corporate global economy, Thapar refers to the insecurities and aggressions that have eroded societal norms and values.

Antonio Gramsci had called upon intellectuals to act as generators of class consciousness and elaborators of homogeneity within a particular social group or class. He favoured the organic intellectuals who speak for the interests of a specific class not only in economic but social and political aspects as well. Their role is to influence social movements and counter the repressive hegemonies persisting in society. Gramsci's theorization was specifically meant for the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe, particularly Italy where the capitalist bourgeois had structurally subjugated the proletariat. Roy's advocacy of the downtrodden, subjugated and oppressed sections of society shows a somewhat indirect link to Gramsci's organic intellectuals. Noam Chomsky's value-oriented intellectual participates in the domain of politics and policy making irrespective of

specialization or expertise. His theory about intellectuals while making a distinction between the policy-oriented and value-oriented intellectuals rejects the conformists and technocratic policy-oriented ones because of their subservience to power. For Edward Said, criticism was of foremost importance to any cultural revolution. His oppositional and critical intellectuals are socially obliged to challenge the status quo and fixity. He sees intellectuals to be primarily responsible for engaging the public and civil society in confronting power and repression, whether practiced by state or the global order. As secular critics, who are actively connected to struggles of the suffering and oppressed people, he considers intellectuals have to be free from dogmatism, fundamentalism and nationalities.

Behind the disparity in wealth and status, the age-old system of oppression and subjugation lurks in myriad forms. New versions of power and authority have become instrumental in the denial of basic rights of people. Intellectuals apart from highlighting such concerns have to aim at creating informed and educated masses that could themselves become agents of change broadening the scope of modern intellectualism. Yet Bhabha finds an uncanny similarity in the endeavours of intellectuals who “located in different historical conjunctures, and speaking in a babel of theoretical voices...ask similar questions. Engaged in diverse political and cultural causes, repeatedly encounter secret shares in an unsettled time of incubation” (9). Intellectuals by virtue of their inner compulsions most often are the people who do not and cannot accept a static society. They are, therefore, always involved in disturbing the status quo that exists in the power relations by taking up cudgels for the cause of the weaker and powerless sections of a society. They get involved in dissemination of ideas to the public by extending their intellectual insights onto the common people in order to bring about social change and transformation. At times they use their intellect in a capacity outside their own particular professional and occupational roles whether that is academics, journalism and media, legal profession, politics or even anonymous blogging. Their responses to issues pertaining to society vary from subtle protest to radical dissent and from non-violent to violent approaches. But in the process of change they are always involved in building and expressing a commitment to modifying the existent reality. Especially in this rapidly changing world order, where powerful forces of modernization, technological advancement, integration, globalization and homogenization have brought alongside them deplorable and critical conditions, intellectuals located in-between culture, society and politics offer a rational analysis and evaluation. Their individual opinions and orientations might vary diversely, yet they share a rejection of oppression, exploitation and damage in the basic human conditions.

There is a strong similarity in the approach of intellectuals as critical rebels in the face of absolutist power in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and the postcolonial hegemonic order sustained through repression and control of the public. Particularly, in the post-Dreyfus, intellectuals have come to represent discrete and ideologically diverse views but the one facet that is similar in their approaches is their dissenting voice as intellectual activists in politically difficult times. The dawn of the twenty-first century saw subtle yet strong intrusions of the political and economic into public and social spheres. This consequently calls for an ever increasing need for writers and intellectuals to divulge into the modern day excesses of power. The changing dynamics of the current world order has turned the structures of society more oppressive with unprecedented

discriminations and subjugations carried out on universal scale. In an age of specialization, where commercialisation and commodification in the globalized economy has left little space for fulfilment of human experience, the changed role of intellectuals demands a rebellion of uncompromising radicalism. Most of contemporary intellectual activism is marked with resistance based on personal ethical obligations justified by legitimacy, thought and credibility. An intellectual, today, has to target his/her radical outlook on the real problems experienced by society in the wake of the political consequences of global capitalism. The definition of an intellectual, which more or less holds true of all contemporary intellectuals irrespective of what nation or society they address or are part of, includes:

“The desire to tell the truth...courage, readiness to carry on rational inquiry to wherever it may lead, to undertake “ruthless criticism of everything that exists, ruthless in the sense that the criticism will not shrink either from its own conclusions or from conflict with the powers that be.” (Marx) An intellectual is thus in essence a *social critic*, a person whose concern is to identify, to analyse, and in this way to help overcome the obstacles barring the way to the attainment of a better, more humane, and more rational social order. As such he becomes the conscience of society and the spokesman of such progressive forces as it contains in any given period of history.” (Baran: 66)

To reach at a comprehensive definition of intellectual that is universally and unanimously acceptable is a formidable and near impossible task. Yet there are some general traits that intellectuals have shared across time and space. Any traditional attempt of defining intellectuals and their roles may be relevant to our contemporary times in a very limited way and by extension. Perhaps because the conditions that we face and live in demand our own breed of new intellectuals who retain some of the traditional notions of an intellectual but modify them to suit the present globalised world with its new set ups, institutions and social issues. The century that saw the heights of such dedicated intellectualism beginning with Gramsci and reaching to pinnacle through Chomsky and Said, also witnessed the World Wars, the Cold War, various successful wars of Independence, end of political colonisation, free market economy, rise of liberal democracies, and globalisation. All these developments should have been very decisive in enhancing freedom and human dignity. But all ages come with peculiar turmoils and predicaments. The postcolonial era also brought with it peculiar problems which are more complex than anything civilization has witnessed. In postcolonial context “there are great lessons to be learned...noble as its liberating aims were, it did not often enough prevent the emergence of repressive nationalist replacements for colonial regimes” (Said 2002: 38). This expression of Said best explains the present day totalitarian and imperialistic world order that emerged after the breakdown of political imperial powers. Contemporary intellectuals and writers participate, through their activism, by initiating discussions and debates which Nadine Gordimer calls a gift of the writers as the primary intellectual figures. “The writer’s gift (through the literary work) to the reader is not social zest or moral improvement or love of country, but an enlargement of the reader’s apprehensions” (Gordimer: 89). It is such apprehensions that eventually broaden public debate and incite criticism.

II. CONCLUSION

Despite the general opinion of critical commentators that the recent decades have essentially seen a decline in the progressive and legitimized space of intellectuals, intellectuals are much needed. Contemporary order demands a redefinition of the intellectual and the public sphere in which they are to operate. There has to emerge responsiveness to new as well as older forms of culture and society and the intellectual activism has to get highly visible in political, cultural and social life. With the drastic changes in all spheres of human life that the twentieth and the twenty-first century witnessed, the intellectual space has been expanded. "The realm of political and public has expanded so much as to be virtually without borders" (Said 2002: 20). Intellectuals too have been defined and re-defined in public consciousness with the changing society. The issues of the contemporary times have somewhat unprecedented existence. Helen Small (1924--), while stressing on the increased place and role of intellectuals in public domain, maintains that "the level of alarm," to which the intellectuals raise their voice is different from the previous centuries and times, "as does the sense of what, if anything, needs to be done, but there is some agreement that an explanation is to be found in a series of structural changes across the course of the twentieth century which have fundamentally affected the ways in which we conceive of the public domain and the kinds of influence that the public intellectual can therefore wield"(2). Intellectuals, in the present times, have deep apprehensions over the social inequalities, lack of freedoms and disrespect of human lives and rights that beset present generations. Intellectuals have to show their social engagement not only by taking stand against authority, power and legitimacy of institutions which have subordinated freedoms, equalities and rights; they also have to extend their knowledge to common people. Intellectuals cannot be perceived to be capable of unilaterally effecting social change and bringing about transformations. Their social commitment and engagement simply means their importance in revealing their particular worldview for public information, knowledge and awareness. The change no matter how big or small eventually has to come from common people. In its modern avatar the intellectual is a forbearer of objectivity, knowledge, ability and a commitment to awaken society. Today when the most civilised countries with all their technological know-how have become totalitarian states intellectuals have come to represent criticism of the power relations. When seen from different perspectives one basic feature and premise of intellectual activity that emerges is the social responsibility of knowledgeable people. They use their capacity and their ability to contribute towards steering society not just for the past events and actions, but also for current and future endeavours. They use their objective observations and candid foresight with the sole aim of making effective contributions for improving society in meaningful ways. The intellectuals, whether organic, value-oriented or oppositional, primarily aim at challenging the status quo by being vocal about the immediate as well as universal concerns of their times. Anti-establishment, radicalism, cultural criticism and resistance are the traits that intellectuals today are seen to possess targeting their radical outlook on real problems experienced by present society. The anticipated result is to sway the public opinion for a "radical transformation of society in the pluralistic society of the welfare state" (Chomsky 1967: 72). Intellectuals remain defiant and relentless in their criticism of issues they consider important for ideal human experience.

III.END NOTES

¹ “The Dreyfus Affair attracted considerable importance at the turn of the century as an expression of heroic defence of justice. In 1894 a bordereau divulging French military secrets was intercepted at the German embassy in Paris and sent to French army intelligence. Dreyfus at the time was a conscientious probationary officer in the French General Staff. On the basis of circumstantial evidence and trumped-up evidence and amid widespread public outbursts of anti-Semitism, he was found guilty of treason. In 1896 evidence came into light that the author of the incriminating memorandum was not Dreyfus but a dissolute infantry officer named Esterhazy. Dreyfus however remained in solitary confinement while the army reluctantly tried Esterhazy and acquitted him. A small group of partisans lobbied vigorously on behalf of Dreyfus but it was not until Emile Zola’s *J’Accuse* appeared on the front page of Georges Clemenceau’s newspaper *L’Aurore* in January 1898 that public debate arose in France and elsewhere to discuss the merits of the case. Zola’s dissenting voice against French army’s injustice and the government’s complicity raised a smouldering public discussion on the incident. Public passion for and against Dreyfus gained momentum and ultimately a second trial was granted in 1899 at Rennes. Dreyfus was again found guilty of treason with extenuating circumstances and sentenced to ten years’ imprisonment. The struggle to clear Dreyfus from the charges against him continued till 1906, when Dreyfus was finally rehabilitated at his former rank.”

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