

Theory for Activism



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Certificate

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled "Theory for Activism" towards the partial fulfilment of the BS-MS dual degree programme at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Pune represents study/work carried out by Reema Jamal Abdul Nassar at EFLU Hyderabad under the supervision of Dilip K Das, Professor, Department of Culture Studies during the academic year January 2019- December 2019.



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1.Introduction

Theory for Activism is an attempt at understanding the role of theory in informing and illuminating activism and its ability to transform social reality. The objective of this study is to determine whether a conceptual model can be developed to understand activism. After tracing different existing theories of social action, one can begin to ask whether activism can be grounded in theory. This requires a rejection of the idea that theory and its abstractions are not accessible or relevant to activists on field. The first task at hand is to define what activism means. The word itself is relatively new and first appeared in the German philosopher, Rudolph Euckens work on ethics and religion in early 20th century (1). He introduced a school of thought known as "actionism" and believed that humans arrive at truth through "actively " striving for a spiritual life and the continued exercise of ethical choices. Euckens faith in moral action was challenged during the first world war and interestingly, supporters of Axis powers called themselves "activists". Even in 1960s, the word has been in use to refer to strikers and political activists as "direct actioners".

It has gone through phases and been coopted by different groups over time but one common theme is: it is always used in the context of deliberate action aimed at changing the world. The intentionality of such action implies agency and this is important for our analysis. In the contemporary world, the word "activist" invokes a certain stereotype. As Astra Taylor writes in "Against Activism", self described activists of today seem to be more interested in sloganeering and protesting out of a passion inflamed with righteousness and less concerned with sustainable strategy (2). Taylor rightfully calls out the limitations of social media activism and insists on the need to go back to organising.

Use of the word "activists" implies that the rest of the people in the world are passive in the fight for justice and only a special few is involved in making real change. Taylor hence rejects the word activists and adopts "organisers" because unlike activists, inherent in the word "organisers" is the need for cooperation and collective effort. Like Taylor, one has to reject the shallow stereotype of activists if we are to really study the impact of theory in social transformations. While it is helpful to reject such a stereotype as we go forward, we have to be careful to differentiate between a foundational theory for activism and various prescriptions for strategies to be used in particular social movements. Theory for Activism is not a how-to book on social movements. Instead the aim is to see how an analysis of human agency and the various structures in society that regulate that agency defines the scope for transformation of societies.

Political psychologists have also studied the various factors that contribute to activist behaviour (3). They have created a generalised "Activist Orientation Scale" in order to measure the propensity for activist behaviour in individuals, which was defined as an "individual's developed, relatively stable, yet changeable propensity to engage in various collective, social-political, problem-solving behaviours spanning a range from low-risk, passive, and institutionalised acts to high-risk, active, and unconventional behaviours. This definition accommodates core elements that cut across several prior definitions of activism: (a) An activist behaviour must pursue collective, as opposed to individual, interests; (b) the behaviour must intend to address some perceived problem, injustice, or disadvantage affecting the collective; (c) the behaviours must be oriented toward change either producing change or preventing change that is advocated by a different collective. In an attempt to define a scale to measure behaviour, as a psychology study would, they have tried to lay out a range of activities that can come under the umbrella of

activism, starting from small donations to confrontations with the police. The study focuses on what behaviour leads to change and accounts for the diversity of engagement. Even though scale of activity and its effectiveness is not the primary concern of our analysis, the study offers a rigorous method to delineate and narrow down the definition.

1.1 History of Research on Social Movements

Research on activism has taken many forms including surveying and analysis of political groups and mass action. Behaviour psychologists have studied it as mass behaviour and group action. Earlier researchers sought to understand resource mobilisation in mass action as a methodology. Some have studied it as political process. But newer social movements, especially across the third world have challenged the older frameworks of study. Some have brought into question the appropriateness of political engagement that is required when researchers undertake such studies and asked if it is possible to do an unbiased analysis in such a situation. Today's global activists are onto developing better frameworks of study. These include the rejection of the older approaches and adoption of a more intersectional and multi pronged approach.

The 1960s were a turning point in the study of social movements due to the many uprisings in multiple cities in the world including New York, Chicago, Berkeley, Paris, Rome, Berlin, Tokyo, Mexico City, Prague, Beijing and others. These movements were tackling multiple problems. They ranged from feminism, civil rights, rights for the disabled, rights for minorities and pro democracy movements. All of these movements, especially the ones outside of Europe and America, proved to be difficult to analyse with models that were made for the developed North. Post this turbulent time of the 1960s, anthropologists who were

usually relegated to studying particular groups like ethnic minorities or peasants or religious sects, began studying the every life of people rather than events. It became more interesting to look at resistance as something seen in the everyday life of people rather than as a string of protests. Closer look at these movements brought to front the truth of how difficult it is to generalise on theories of social movements. Because on a closer look one can see many divisions between groups fighting alongside each other. Coalitions can keep forming and splitting and reforming with ideological alliances changing constantly.

Researchers have criticised the tendency of anthropologists to study social movements that they are concerned with rather than building a general analytical framework for any social movement. Especially with the rise of identity politics, researchers were found to be nit picking the movements they like and also avoiding looking at right wing movements. But this soon gave way to a transnational activism that was varied and wide in its approach. Transnational activists brought attention to a diverse set of social and political movements that focused on the struggle for equality especially in the third world.

Marc Edelman in “Social Movements and changing paradigms and forms of politics” focuses on the need for a general theory of social movements. Until that point researchers and intellectuals who studied revolutions, protests, civil rights movements and other mass movements tended to put them in special boxes. This compartmentalisation in terms of the politics involved or geography made it difficult to ask abstract questions on the fundamental nature of mass movements. There were also were very little collaboration between scholars in the field which diluted the richness of their analysis, often limiting it to case studies. So even though anthropologists, social scientists and political scientists were theorising on different aspects of social movements, they rarely ever shared their notes with each other.

Edelman makes a good attempt at looking at social movements generally. He focuses on American and Europe as vast amounts of theorisation on the development of politics is already available in the west. There is a rich history of activist and academicians working with each other. But often the result of such work doesn't appear in journals but instead in media, webpages, and organising groups. So these become important sources. While studying paradigm shifts in the nature of activist movement in the 1960s, Edelman found some radical shifts in academia's response to mass action in social spheres.

To understand the need for paradigm shift of the 1960s, we see that social movement theories that was made earlier than the said period proved to be insufficient. Most of them focused on collective behaviour as matter of whether there are rational individuals or irrational ones. The rise of totalitarians and extremist fanatic sects were explained away as irrational members unable to evaluate their own interest in the group but remaining due to the cultural power of the ideology or the charm of a magnetic leader. Rational individuals were thought to never involve in collective action because they would know that the individual profit from participation would be low and that they can get a free ride on the back of more sacrificing members. But the movements one saw in the 1960s were not of totalitarians neither were there rational actors that stayed home for selfish interests.

The long 1960s were also known to be the times Marxist theories were increasingly applied in European universities to understand social movements. This wasn't as straightforward as before, as there were multiple classes involved including a dominant middle class leadership. This meant that there was no sharp boundary between the proletariat and bourgeoisie. In different constituencies within each movements, multiple classes participated with varying interests. Despite these vague definitions, by the mid 1970s two

approaches can be identified. One was called the New Social Movement theory and the other Resource Mobilisation theory. New Social Movements focused on identity creation.

1.2 New Social Movements Theory

One of the biggest proponents of the New Social Movement approach was Tourraine who sought to identify a “central conflict” in society. He says that for Marx this was the conflict between the capitalists and the labourers. But this conflict becomes diluted in a post industrialised world where most people don’t easily fall into one or the other boxes. This is where Weber comes in, who talks of peoples identities outside of their work and in their everyday life. Weber focused on the actor” in social movements who is constantly struggling to develop a cultural and ethical model for constituting social action". He ignored the movements that were directed at the state and instead focused on the movements that sought to change the way of life in societies. Melucci, who worked under Tourraine developed his methods further. He added to the approach by looking at the steps that actors take to reach to the point of social transformation. According to him, actors first identify the commonalities and then develop opposing relations with groups who may have claim to same values or goods and this adversary relation strengthens the movement. When actions that push the tolerance of the social systems keep piling up the systems organically change according to the actors agenda.

Theorists coming from the New Social Movements theory contrasted the nature of modern social movement and the old labor movements. Labour movements put class at the centre of every organisation. Class relations defined these movements so completely that other aspects were never significant. But the conflicts in modern times were rarely only class related. These movements were headlined by people who wished to win for themselves

certain specificities of existence and use that to distinguish between themselves. But just the premise of discontent with processes of creating cultural and political identities was not enough to create a movement and this is where social scientists started focusing on strategy and resource allocation within organisations.

1.3 Resource Mobilisation Theory

One of the earlier approaches to social movement theory was “resource mobilisation” theory. Under this framework, organisations were seen as interest groups and their movements were determined by how well they were able to convert their common interest into effective resource mobilisation within the group in order to activate change. So if one group had discontent with a certain social order, their movement's success depended on how well they are able to weaponise this discontent and distribute it efficiently within the group and also use it to recruit new members. Resource mobilisation tended to focus too much on the “success” of interest groups and this was usually understood to be some kind of policy change. They studied well endowed organisations and competition among them to get their interests ahead. But resource mobilisation theories often ignored movements by the poorest people in society who lacked any resources or those who could not afford to organise as efficiently. The poor or the marginalised rarely thought in terms of “resource management” or vested interests, but usually led movements as an immediate response to crippling conditions of inequality. These theorists weren't as cognisant of the spontaneous nature of most grassroots movements. Feelings of solidarity are central to the ways in which these movements take shape in communities, sometimes even cutting across common interests.

1.4 Political Opportunity Structures

Scholars of “Political Opportunity Structures” advocated for adding to the resource mobilisation theory, a context based analysis of the balance of opportunities and threats faced by a community that is organising against an authority. This approach tried to quantify the many factors that facilitate or repress a social movement. Many European scholars took to this kind of study where they analysed the frequency of events across time and also at a certain moment in time. Looking at events across time allowed them to identify the common patterns in the repression and facilitations of social movements. Some studied restricted their focus to a certain geographical location while others conducted cross national studies. Political Opportunity structures had its origins in the early industrial era protests and their studies by early scholars, quantified factors like geographical location and types of participants who were threatened, damages caused and the types of sponsors of these movements.

Political opportunity structures and its scholars were critiqued widely for their ignorance about race and gender identities. The theory was seen as too broad and unable to explain anything concrete because of the same reason. Social movements cannot be abstracted to just threats and facilitations or opportunity because of the complicated ways in which these dynamics evolve. Political opportunity theories are rightfully criticised because they ignored the very people and their identities that supposedly take up these opportunities. So as time progressed people began looking at the political processes that create movements as a mixture of mobilising structures, political opportunities and framing. Framing along with the other two categories took care of the specificities of each social movements and its participants dynamics both internally and externally. This focus on the complicated political process brought a deeper sense to the ways in which participants form group identities and understand social events in a dramaturgical process of analysing their own social reality. This

meant that one could understand how people viewed their social reality and also how they imagined alternatives to that reality and constructed processes for transforming it via collective action.

Edelman tries to understand why social movement theories developed so differently in the US and Europe. US focused on the Resource Mobilisation Theory while Europe was the epicentre for New social Movements. This was because United States lacked a strong marxist tradition and the civil rights movement was the primary subject of study. Without strong labour unions and social democratic organisations that was seen in Europe, United States took a strong entrepreneurial approach to understand social movements. The problem was that scholars in Europe and America worked in isolation. It was only in the middle of 1980s that trans Atlantic collaboration, seminars and conferences began.

In Latin America, New Social Movement Theory was preferred over Resource Mobilisation And Political Opportunity theories. This was because there were not much resources or political opportunities that were available to people under extremist military regimes. The anti US sentiment also helped pushed Latin America towards New Social Movement theory and the European paradigm. This is understandable because Torraine, the biggest proponent of New Social Movement they spent a few years at University of Chile . One of the authors widely read in Latin America, Laclau was an Argentinian who moved to Europe. Generally these theorists , including anthropologists of the time were becoming increasingly aware of cultural forces that lead to social and political transformation over time.

The 1994 Zapatists uprising in Mexico was a widely studied event among Latin American scholars. It was largely an agrarian movement that was aimed at land reform and constitutional remedies. The peasants were unhappy with the North American Free Trade Agreement as it forced them into poverty. But this movement soon grew into the Zapatista

Liberation army which included not just peasants but also students and multiple indigenous groups. It became a general movement for all those who were subjugated to poverty in the country. One researcher who started studying the local area of Chiapa a decade before it grew to participate in a mass movement, showed through his studies how democracy was achieved in Mexico from the addition of small local movements involving different groups and not a single national movement.

The Zapatista movement is a great example because of its decentralisation and its relevance till today. The group now has a strong internet presence managed by NGOs and other private individuals that allow them to mobilise at short notice whenever necessary. Such a post modern movement makes a lot of sense in a multi ethnic Mexico. The Zapatista Liberation army continues to fight neoliberal capitalism in Mexico. In the rest of Latin America agrarian forces and movements for the landless labourers were the most common. What is notably missing is right wing movements . Even though due to democratisation and the progressive movements themselves , conservative groups were quite active during these times too, scholars selectively ignored them and rarely every looked at theorisation of right wing movements as a primary subject.

Edelman concludes by saying that. Scholars have not been able to keep up with rapid ways in which social movements have changed with globalisation and the internet. Social movements today often have international audiences and the methods are varied. While there are unpredictable post modern elements like cyber attack and movements against supranational bodies and corporates, the tradition modes still remain. They take the form of anti state demonstrations and pro democracy organisation in certain pockets. This means scholars will have to redefine what social movement participation means and also develop more robust frameworks of study for the new era.

The field of social activism research is complicated and resists generalisation. Collaboration between activists and academicians are limited by access, worries of bias and often crime risks and safety, especially in tense political environments. In the digital era, activists have taken new approaches to mobilisation. Media is a key player in this. Traditional Media constantly follows activists and their protests. Social Media allows these activists to reach audiences that may not be active participants but gain sympathisers across the globe. This brings a contrast between the activist online and activist in person.

Researchers have studied how activism informs political organisations and creates political identities. Social movements were seen as phenomena in societies and then later as networks of people who organise and create change. Scholars have also looked at the role of activism in democracy. Some view activism as indispensable to democracy and its functioning. Researchers have also looked at activism as shifts in ideologies of communities by continued action.(4)

Methodology :

The methodology that this study on theory for activism will follow will include tracing themes of agency, power, social action, subject and ideology. These themes have been selected as they are best suited for comparing the different schools of philosophy from humanism to post positivist realism and understanding their differences and similarities. These themes are also largely what governs any theory on social action especially that of agency. To theorise the idea of activism is to theorise agency itself.

2. Humanism and Activism

2.1 Introduction

Humanism is a philosophy that covers a large array of western thought on education, religion, science, art ,ethics etc, with a primary focus on the human realm. In the west,It originated in the 13th and 14th century Italy. Parallels to humanist thought is also seen in Buddhism, Confucius, Ancient India and Medieval Muslims but the word itself is associated with Western philosophy. Before Humanism, the dominant philosophy was Scholasticism ,which was devoted to Catholic orthodoxy. Scholasticism struggled to reconcile the thoughts of Aristotle and Plato with the theology of the time. Humanism evolved as a critical response to theology based scholasticism and explored the idea of what it meant to be human without a reliance on the supernatural. To put it simply, Humanists believe in the human potential to attain meaning, value and live a dignified life by relying on their inherent abilities to think critically about the world around them. There are few central themes in humanism: realism, critical inquiry, individualism and human dignity. Realism forced thinkers to see people and the world for what they are, rather than what they are supposed to be according to God, tradition or dogma . Critical inquiry and an attention to detail as a part of humanist thought , paved the way for modern science. The natural universe began to be treated as a system that is constantly changing rather than being revealed by God. This skepticism evolved to be the foundation of scientific method of experimentation and observation of the modern era. (5)

There are different types of humanism: secular humanism, religious humanism, educational humanism, renaissance humanism, integral humanism, marxist humanism and post humanism. These have developed across a range of time and space. What is of most

relevance to this thesis would be marxist humanism and post humanism or any critique of humanism in the 20th century as these are closer to our times and engages deeply with the concept of agency. Marxist humanism draws from Marx's earlier texts that talked of the alienation that is caused by labour in a capitalist system. This concept of alienation had some parallels with humanist thought on autonomy and dignity. According to Marx, both were denied to the labourer in a system of organisation based on social class. The text that will be considered under this chapter on humanism and activism, does evoke Marx and other marxist thinkers who spoke of how capitalism denies the essential humanity of the labour class.

The humanist theme that is of relevance to this thesis is individualism and human dignity. Humanists rejected the notion that human potential and character is determined and limited by God. But instead came to the conclusion that human beings are capable of reasoning and asking questions about the universe themselves. The individual was recognised as having the autonomy to ask questions about his own identity and morality and arrive at their answers independent of divine intervention. This faith in the human ability of self analysis , led humanist to believe that humans should be able to arrive at a set of moral values that validates the assumed autonomy and dignity of all humans. This led to moral universalism , that affirmed the moral worth of all humans. With unshaken faith in rationality and human ability of self determination, humanism argued for individual freedom, cooperation, tolerance, compassion and rejection of authoritarianism. A large part of modern day activism is human rights activism which is based on universal human rights rooted in humanism. Humanists believed individuals are capable of building dignified lives for themselves and their communities via this thought and this is what makes it a great starting point for tracing what theory has to offer for activism and human agency.

2.2 Paulo Friere

The primary text that is going to be studied to understand theory for activism in the context of humanism, is Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed". Freire was an educator in Brazil who was tasked with designing literacy programs for the poor in the 1950s and 1960s. He was married to Elza Oliveira, a primary school teacher who urged him to work on theories on pedagogy. "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" is written from his experience in using education to liberate the oppressed. Brazil, like many other South American countries during the Cold War had undergone a United States backed military coup that replaced a left leaning government with an anti communist military regime. After the left leaning president was removed in 1964, the military banned any programs that was considered "radical" or communist. This included Freire's literacy programs and he was forced to live in exile in Chile. It is during his 6 years of exile in Chile that he writes "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", which is published in 1968. Freire was witness to the rise of an oppressive regime and his writing on education as a tool for freedom is directly informed by that experience (6).

In order to understand what Freire has to offer to theory for activism, let us first look at what he recognises as the social condition that needs to be transformed. The central problem in Freire's thesis is dehumanisation of the oppressed people. Oppression is defined as a distortion of people's natural process of humanisation. While this oppression maybe along the lines of class, race etc, the consequence is the same. Oppression creates incomplete human beings. Thus, Freire's theory for liberation rests on a fundamental assumption on what it means to be human. Critical consciousness and freedom to transform one's conditions of existence is understood to be essential and natural to being human. This essentialism that affirms autonomy and human dignity is what makes Friere's text unquestionably humanist.

Pedagogy of the Oppressed is a moral call to action that is based on humanist morals. While there may be many books on humanism, Freire's text is a particularly well suited one to understand its impact on theories of social action. This is because it is a direct result of Freire's decades of real experience with collective action and it is written as a model for social action, with the particular focus on education as a tool for change. Freire writes with a certain moral absoluteness and universality, that is easily understood as humanist.

Freire makes it clear in the very beginning that he is writing the book for "radicals" and not "sectarians". To be radical, according to Freire is to be critical and not to condemn reality and history to any inescapable certainty, for that is the job of sectarians who stick to a sect and its ideology blindly and without question. He writes for a radical who he hopes will understand the importance of helping people attain "Conscientização" which when loosely translated from Portuguese to English means consciousness raising. By consciousness raising, Freire is talking about one's ability to recognise the contradictions in the social, political and economic reality one finds themselves in and to act against such oppression. "Conscientização" is now a popular concept in social work and even in social science research and education. In contemporary social work, campaigns for "raising awareness" are quite common. These campaigns draw from the same concept in so far as assuming that, to become conscious of one's oppressive conditions of existence is the first step to liberation. But there is a difference between awareness campaigns targeted at merely bringing attention to certain problems and the consciousness raising that Freire is concerned with. The difference is in how deeply Freire believes critical consciousness to be fundamental to being human and not limited to a passive observation of reality. This means that Freire's radical will have to engage in real dialogue with the people that forces them to engage with reality in a

manner that enables them to transform it. It is for this task that he prescribes a pedagogy of the oppressed.

Freire's pedagogy has two steps. First step is the oppressed attaining consciousness of their oppression and transforming their conditions of existence. The second step is the adoption of the pedagogy of the oppressed that allowed them to gain their humanity back by all humans. This final step will ensure that freedom is guaranteed for all humans and not just a few. Freire sets the task of liberation as a task for the oppressed. The project of liberation has to be one that has the oppressed at the centre. Freire's insistence that this movement has to be led by the oppressed and not their benevolent allies can be understood if one looks at his goal. His goal is not merely to remove the oppressor class and their domination. It is to affirm the humanity of all people. The oppressed class is the one that understands the most the value of freedom and the terrors that happen in its absence. For even if their allies are sympathetic, they cannot fully know the reality of oppression and the dehumanisation caused by it. The oppressed achieving "Conscientizacao" will ensure that they have the tools necessary to hold on to their humanity under any circumstance. The process of liberation is in itself the process of humanisation, so the oppressed must take it on themselves. It cannot be handed to them, and they should also reject any benevolence from the oppressor who is not in real solidarity with them.

2.3 Praxis

After establishing the goal of his pedagogy, Freire goes on to the question of how. "Praxis" is the answer he offers and it is defined as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it". Praxis has to be the combination of reflection and action and cannot be either exclusively. Freire believes action without reflection or reflection without action as equally inadequate for liberation. Interestingly, he calls action without reflection as

“activism”. He is equally critical of reflection empty of action as it will only lead to armchair revolution and not real revolution. Action needs to be followed by reflection on its consequences. This way praxis will become the ultimate purpose of those fighting for freedom. Revolution cannot be private but one that engages all people. It is not a mission for an individual but the means to freedom for everyone.

2.4 Oppressor-Oppressed Contradiction

Freire seeks to understand the contradictions that exist within the consciousness of the oppressed and the oppressor that maintains the status quo. The oppressed is said to have a dual consciousness which leads to the contradiction between the oppressed person’s recognition of his own dehumanisation and the fear of the oppressor which makes them justify the same dehumanisation. This allows them to continue living in the fear of freedom. Even when they don’t have real freedom to act as they wish to they pretend that acting in submission to the oppressor is freedom. Education informed by Freire’s pedagogy intends to empower the oppressed to break this contradiction themselves via critical thinking. Freire also speaks of the oppressors consciousness which makes them objectify everything. To be is to have and in the process of having the oppressor dehumanise people and themselves.

2.5 Banking Model Vs Problem Posing Model

Freire proposes dialogue between revolutionaries and the oppressed as the only tool that can break the cycle of oppression. Revolutionaries must stand in true solidarity with the oppressed by realising their full conditions of existence rather than objectifying them. Freire proposes education as key to this dialogue. Freire criticises narrative form of teaching that

objectifies students as the content of learning is merely narrated to them by the teacher. This is called the “banking model” of education which treats students as depositories of information. Freire intends to break this teacher-students contradiction that presupposes that teachers know everything and the students know nothing until they are taught. Banking model aides the oppressors by denying the students ability to critically think for themselves. He rejects the paternalism of the oppressor who treats the oppressed as welfare recipients who need to be taught how to adjust to their idea of a just society. The purpose of education is to empower the oppressed to criticise and transform the structures of oppression that converted them into “marginals”.

Banking model turns educated individuals into a better fit for serving the purpose of oppression. Freire associates teacher supremacy and its oppression with death itself. He urges true revolutionaries to take up the “problem posing” model of education. This ensures that students don’t just passively observe the world but become aware of their consciousness itself which will enable them to engage with reality with intent to transform it. Problem posing model converts teachers and students to teacher-students and student teachers. No one has absolute authority on the object of the world but the perception of reality is arrived at by constant dialogue between teacher -students and student-teachers. Problem posing educator will not deposit on to the students his version of reality but instead invite the student to engage in a dialogue with him. This means that the teacher is also learning form the student. They become co investigators of the world.

Problem posing model will allow students to think of their relationship to the world and people’s relationships with each other. So they know longer think of the world as happening to them but constantly created in consciousness by them. This according to Freire is the beginning of critical consciousness. They are able to put things into

perspective. Problem posing model emphasises change and rejects fatalism and permanence. Freire proposes that the problem posing model will allow the oppressed to recognise the social, economic and political contradictions in their world as problems that can be challenged.

2.6 Dialogue

An important component of Freire's praxis is the "word". True words according to Freire should not just name the world but in doing so open up the scope for transforming it and renaming it. So words should belong to everyone and one man's word should not dominate another man's word. Dialogue is not possible between 2 groups where one denies the other the right to speak. Dialogue cannot occur between the oppressed and their oppressor. Freire says that dialogue cannot exist between people who doesn't have love for the world and its people. The act of loving in itself is dialogical. A leader should also have humility in order to engage in dialogue. Because if one lacks humility, they will be blind to their own ignorance and assume the ignorance of others with arrogance. Freire requires the radical to have faith in humankind and their ability to transform the world even if oppression sometimes takes away that ability.

Freire predicts that dialogue which is based in love, humility and faith will create mutual trust between those engaged in it. Dialogue also requires hope and critical thinking. Requiring dialogue to be the model for education means that the teacher-student will focus on the aspect of the world that they wish to have a dialogue with student-teachers about rather than content to be narrated. Program content of humanist education should take into account real experiences of the students rather than the teachers version of their reality.

Freire uses animal and human differences to ascertain his definition of human as being with critical consciousness. Unlike animals human beings are able to make themselves the object of reflection. Animals are ahistorical in the sense that they are not able to place themselves in time and perceive past, present and future. Humans unlike animals are able to understand time and take action with intention to transform their future. Animals are just an extension of their physical body and responds to stimulus in their world in a reactionary manner without analysis. Humans are able to create culture and history. Animals are not capable of praxis whereas human are which means that human beings can produce things that are not material or immediately related to their body , like social institution, ideas and concepts.

2.7 Decoding Themes

Epochs that are recognised by humans represent a complex of ideas that exist in dialectic relationship with each other over a period of time. This systems of themes in an epoch becomes the “thematic universe”. These themes may exist in opposition to each other and it is their perception that determines historical action. Freire thus says they need to be investigated. Investigation of meaningful thematics in history thus becomes necessary for liberation. Freire identifies two opposing themes of the anthropological era: domination and liberation. Epochs may also have sub themes in particular contexts. In fact general themes exist as concentric circles, containing within them many sub themes. An important element of attaining critical consciousness is to place sub themes and general themes in relation to each other. For example, struggles that a nation may face will include particular struggles within its states. For absolute liberation, Freire demands that the entire thematic universe be critically analysed and its many interacting components recognised as such creating a whole

Freire's believes people have to actively investigate themes in their own life that will help them develop a view of the world. Themes don't exist by themselves as a matter of fact, but it is the human investigation of them that creates it. Themes exist when people analyse their relationship to the world. Investigation of themes must involve thinking about the ways in which people think about their world. This reveals to the investigators the fundamental truth of consciousness as existing in relation to other people's consciousness and never in isolation. Thus the problem posing model is able to re-present the universe and its thematics to the students not as lecture but as a problem.

Freire provides an example for his pedagogy that incorporates the problem posing model. A group of educators are tasked with creating a literacy program for peasants. The first step in creating an education model is to understand the people and their ways of living and thinking. In order to study the themes in this present problem, the educators have to include equal number of volunteers from the community as there are educators. The two groups then assess the themes and present their findings. Then the contradictions within these investigations are resolved via dialogue. This will ensure that the literacy programs is not just created for the peasants but created by them which leads to its easier adoption and continued relevance. In entering in dialogue with the educators the peasants will be able to criticise their early perception of their own world and develop a new one. Once the themes have been categorised they can be handed over to specialists like sociologists, psychologists, economists and politicians so they can add to it without destroying their interdependence.

2.8 Cultural Action

From Freire's work with education, he recognises "culture" as a master theme among most investigations aimed at liberation. Discussion on culture can often lead to more

discussion on varied topics making it nuclei for thematic investigation. This leads him to analyse theories of cultural action. Cultural analysis can easily bring to the forefront people's relationship the world and with each other. Freire advises revolutionary leaders not to wait until they have power to begin the education programmes. People will not know how to use power if they are not participants in the revolution that aims to achieve power.

Freire describes multiple kinds of anti-dialogical and dialogical action. Conquest, divide and rule, manipulation cultural invasion are anti-dialogical whereas cooperation, unity for liberation and cultural synthesis is dialogical. Anti-dialogical action supports the oppressor whereas dialogical action support the liberation of the oppressed. Conquest allows oppressor to own people. Divide and rule helps the oppressor create factions within the oppressed classes so as to ensure that they don't unite against the oppressor. Manipulation of the oppressed includes creating myths that presents the status quo as permanent and justified. Cultural invasion of the oppressed classes converts their culture and values into that of the oppressor. Cooperation between the revolutionary leaders and the oppressed is the only way to challenge oppression. Unity for liberation focuses on removing the myths of division between the oppressed and helping them identify with each other. Unity will help them get out of individual narratives of oppression and realise that they are a part of a whole class of people who is experiencing the same thing. Finally Freire positions cultural synthesis as the ultimate result of cultural action. Cultural synthesis stands for dialogue between different cultures without one trying to dominate the other. This kind of cultural co existence will guarantee equality and freedom for all cultures and thus humanise all people. (7)

2.9 Criticism of Freire's Pedagogy

Now that we have outlined the primary thesis in Freire's pedagogy of the Oppressed, let us see if it holds up as a universal theory for social action. The most glaring evidence against the adoption of pedagogy of oppressed as a coherent theory for activism, is its unjustified universalism and absolutism. Freire makes many assumptions while laying out his theory. These assumptions are not fully justified and is originating from his own beliefs rather than empirical evidence. These include critical consciousness as essential to being human, the oppressed and the oppressor is divided neatly into two groups that always oppose each other and freedom is naturally humanising in nature for all people. Freire does not answer at what point in the process of liberation does one's consciousness qualify as critical enough to be humanising. Even though he accepts that the oppressed is able to perceive their lack of freedom, he still calls them incomplete human beings.

There are many internal contradictions within Freire's pedagogy. He defines consciousness of objective reality as the goal of the humanisation project. Reality is "revealed" to the oppressed once they let go of their false consciousness. By calling the internalised oppression of people as false consciousness Freire is doing the same thing he advises against. If the educator has already decided that the oppressed suffer from false consciousness, they can no longer be unbiased investigators of that consciousness. People's consciousness of their world cannot be judged as false without investigating the processes of creating that consciousness in the first place. If people have inherent abilities to be critical then what allows oppression to take root in any society? Freire's argument that humans have consciousness as an essential quality implies they can never truly be oppressed. But that is not true.

Freire talks in contradictory manner about reality and its perception. On one side he says humans can perceive reality objectively, outside of themselves but on the other side he

says reality and history doesn't exist outside of humans. If reality exists only in the consciousness of humans, which is the point he makes when he contrasts the human with the animal, how can it be judged as absolutely true or false. This becomes a problem of which comes first? Objective fact of existence or consciousness of it? In his bid to affirm the absolute agency of humans over their world, he minimises the impact of processes that limit that agency.

Dialogue is key to Freire's model and important to be established between all groups to ensure liberation of all. But the same dialogue he says is not possible between the oppressed and the oppressor. If the oppressed cannot talk to the oppressor, then how do they begin to get allies? Where does the revolutionary leader Freire talks of come from? If he is meant to come from allies within the class of oppressors how did he come to identify with the oppressed? Freire assumes the existence of radical allies without explaining their origins. Freire constantly warns against playing messiah or acting as the provider of freedom, but asks the oppressed people to liberate themselves and their oppressors from dehumanising practises of oppression. He treats them as the messiah who can do it all, going against his own advice.

One has to be critical of Freire's painting of all people into 2 distinct categories. Oppressors are assumed to have complete power of the oppressed. Freire doesn't interrogate the relationship between the two with nuance. This leads to gross simplification of power relations in society. If the false consciousness of oppressed can be understood by their conditions of existence, what governs the conditions of existence of the oppressor? Freire doesn't consistently think about the impact of external structures on people's consciousness. When he does it, it is to merely explain away the case of the false consciousness of the oppressed and not the consciousness of the oppressor.

Freire's left leaning bias is also seen in his recognition of class struggle but not that of others forms of oppression. Oppression can be along the lines of factors outside of class like race and gender. At the same time he doesn't give enough substance to the material conditions of oppression and often jumps to the ideal. Freire's pedagogy doesn't work in these other forms of oppression, because once an intersectional analysis of oppression is done, the dichotomy of the oppressed and the oppressors cease to exist which is the foundation of Freire's pedagogy. If a peasant who is oppressed by his landowner, beats up his wife everyday, which group does he belong to ? The oppressed or the oppressor ? Freire's pedagogy also has limited application in modern societies with a growing middle class and not just an upper and lower class. Even if one were to stick to the economic model of oppression, there are no distinct binary teams. Freire contradicts himself when he gives tips to the teacher-student. He says they are never to prescribe but ends up making space for "expertise" and assumes the commitment of student-teachers.

2.10 Freire On Ideology

Freire's analysis of the inner consciousness of the oppressed offers some insight into what he believed about people's relationship to their reality and how they perceive it. He recognises that the oppressed may resist change because they identify with the oppressor. The systems of oppression has forced them to align with the oppressor. It denies them the ability to identify themselves as individuals outside of oppression. Oppressed is said to have "false consciousness" of themselves and their condition of oppression. Freire doesn't talk explicitly of Ideology while discussing consciousness but he is consistently ideological while prescribing his pedagogy. The content of ideology for Freire is that which is created by the oppressor to keep the oppressed under the illusion that their reality is inalterable and

permanent and even justified. He doesn't interrogate his own ideology or recognise the position of ideology in his pedagogy. This is because he has simplified the goals of the oppressor and their relationship to the oppressed. The oppressor seeks power because he has to own power in order to sustain the status quo and not because he believes that is the just order within his ideology.

Freire offers psychological explanations of the consciousness of oppressors and the oppressed but doesn't explain how ideology acts on them. Even when he clearly references Marxist thinkers, he doesn't stop to clarify the ideological position of these thinkers. The internalisation of oppression that one sees in the oppressed classes is seen as false consciousness and not as ideological prison built for them by the structures of oppression. He also doesn't interrogate the ideological motivations of the revolutionary leader. Ideology is treated the same way as propaganda and not as universal fact acting upon the oppressed and the oppressor. All ideologies for Freire are oppressive as they conceal reality rather than reveal it. Within this lies the assumption that there exists an object reality that can be revealed via critical inquiry.

2.11 Freire on Power and Freedom

Freire writes : "Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion. " (Freire ,p) . It is very clear that he believed that freedom was necessary to be human. He believed that freedom will come at the end of revolution. Freedom is denied to the oppressed. The problem with this simplistic idea of freedom is its failure to recognise the

many levels at which freedom and power can coexist, Power is a quality entirely attributed to the oppressor class. Power can only seek to oppress in the eyes of Freire. This is why he warns against revolutionary leaders vying for power in order to transform the system. Power in itself cannot be transformative as to own power is to oppress. This is not what one sees in the real world. Power relations are rarely absolute. In fact if the power of oppressors were so absolute how will the revolution that Freire talks of be possible ?

2.12 Freire on Subject

Freire uses "Subject" to refer to those who actively engage in their reality in order to transform it. His capitalisation of the word stresses on the complete agency of the actor. Freire's Subject is the product of liberation. The Subject that refuses to be objectified by oppression. Freire speaks of the Subject so as to reject the conversion of people by oppression into objects. Objects are acted upon where's Subjects can act themselves to create reality. The goal of the humanisation project is to make all people Subjects in history rather than objects. Freire's theorisation on subjectivity and objectivity and their dialectic relationship allows us to see why he insists that becoming a true Subject is necessary to be human. In Freire's text, the human constantly seeking to transform their world and humanise all people, is in the process of being a Subject. Which is the same as in the process of being human. This concept of the active subject will be critiqued as we go forward.

2.13 Freire on Agency and Social Action

Agency is assumed throughout Freire's text. It is an essential quality to being human. Agency can always be regained even if it is taken away by oppression. In Freire's theory for

social action, people can and they must act upon their conditions of existence in order to transform it. Freire's humanism and assumption of agency causes him to be less critical of structures in society that may limit that agency. He recognises only one force that acts against the agency of humans and that is domination. But social structures can limit the agency of humans through many different means both partially and completely . He fails to recognise that a coherent theory for social action must take into account how all humans are conditioned by the external world and its structures. While Freire has had a huge impact on education in the western world , he fails to provide a theory of social action that is consistent and without contradiction. This is because most of his claims of humanisation is said to be self evident rather than being presented as justified via reason and empirical evidence.

3.Structuralism, Post-structuralism and Activism

3.1 Introduction

Structuralism originated in linguistics from the work of Ferdinand De Saussure. Saussure was interested in linguistics at an early age and wanted to radically change the methodology of study in the field. After spending his initial efforts studying the history and origin of languages he soon realised that the study language required an analysis of nature of language itself. Before Saussure, linguistics was focused on studying history, translation ,evolution, and preservation of languages. But after Saussure linguistics focused on the basic tenets of the nature of language. Saussure adopted a scientific method to study the object of language and its function.He is most known for “ A course in general linguistics” which is a collection of lectures he gave in Geneva that was published posthumously.(8)

In his lectures, Saussure proposed that language exists as a structured system of signs and that meaning is created by the interrelations between these signs. This idea of structure as a whole with components existing in relation to each other , is the central idea of structuralism that gets adopted by various fields of study. Structuralism focused on abstracting the general pattern and systemising it. Levi Strauss adopted structuralism in anthropology to study culture. Strauss looked at culture as a system of elements which was defined by the basic structures of human mind. He understood kinship and social relationships not as a matter of fact but as a product of human thought which has a structure. Strauss’s use of Saussure’s linguistics was new in anthropology. In the same way that

Saussure forced a scientific analysis of the basic structure of language Strauss sought to find in the study of culture the basic structure of human mind.

Strauss's example helps us understand the wide ranging impact of structuralism. Let us explore the ideas from "A course in general linguistics" that will become relevant to our exploration of theory of social action. Saussure makes an important distinction between "Speech" and "language" (parole and langue). Speech is done by an individual whereas language evolves from a community that shares a common system of signification. Speech includes the individual texts and dialects that one may use and is a particular manifestation of the general system of language. Language cannot be made by an individual. It exists as system of signs whose meaning and inter relationships are dependent on the consensus reached by the community who speaks that language. The individual cannot create a word and its meaning in isolation, it attains meaning only if society agrees to it. In this way, structuralism presents the ultimate limit to the agency of the individual. If meaning making processes are essentially social, what does that say about the agency of the individual? This is why structuralism is a valid critique of positivism and humanism. In positivism objects have meaning as an inherent quality whereas Saussure's structuralism proves that no object can have meaning in isolation from the larger structures within which it exists.(9)

Saussure defines sign as composed by signified and a signifier. The signifier is the sound image and the signified is the concept. And the product of this relationship is the sign. For example the sound "chair" is the signifier for the concept of chair which is the signified. Saussure says that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. The sound "chair" has nothing to do with the concept chair itself. This association is random. The sign gets its meaning from its differences from other signs. The sound "chair" in itself has

nothing to do with the concept of chair but its unique association with the concept and lack of association with any other concept and the context of this association with other associations in other signs, produces the unique meaning of the sign. That is chair gets its meaning not just from the sound image or the concept but in the fact that it is not a table or bed or any other entity. So meaning in language is created by a system of differences rather than their absolute positive value.

The human mind is able to organise the system of signs into a structure. This doesn't mean that language is stationary. The evolution of language can be studied over time and at a certain point of time. But language cannot be changed by an individual, only speech communities can change language over time. This can happen with overlapping generations of people where the signs may change both in its meaning and its content, that is sound image and concept and its relationship. What is of relevance to this study is the production of meaning via opposition and differences rather than positive values.

Structuralist thought when applied to theories of social action forces us to look at the structures in societies that create and maintain social realities. Just like how the system of signs via their interrelations maintain the structure of language. Structuralists identify social conditions that act upon individuals to create society. This means that individuals don't create their social conditions of existence in isolation but social institutions and their relationships to individuals create society. This severely limits the agency of individuals to transform their conditions of existence. In order to understand what structuralists have to offer to the question of theory of social action, we will be looking at Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses". Althusser offers an addition to the ways in which the state represses people. This is through ideology. Marx himself didn't focus on ideology as necessary for reproduction of the exploitative relationships between the upper and lower classes and this where

Althusser comes in. Althusser describes the structuralist nature of the function of ideology. Studying Althusser will help us understand structuralism and theories of social action from a post Marxist lens.

The recognition of structures in any context takes place at the level of the unconscious and its purpose is to arrive at general patterns. This is where post structuralism contradicts with structuralism. Post structuralism is critical of the completeness of the structure of language. Major thinkers of post structuralism include Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. Post structuralism focusses on the slippage in meaning that is seen within supposedly complete structures of signs. Post structuralism focuses on the gaps in the structure and considers that as the matter of inquiry. While structuralism argues that the networks of signs and their relationships form a complete structure, post structuralist argue that meaning is messy and not exclusively systematised. (10)

Let us go back to the example of the chair. Even if we don't change the sound image and the concept that the sign is referring to, chair can also evoke a meaning of leadership. Like the "chair of a board of an institution". This meaning is not directly implied in the initial explanation of the concept of chair. If the structure of meaning was complete, the same sign should not have evolved a different relationship between the signified and the signifier. So even if structuralist recognise that chair gets its meaning from not being a table or couch, it doesn't explain the meaning it has acquired as a symbol of authority or leadership. This is the slippage in meaning that post structuralist argue can be found everywhere in the system of signs.

Post structuralist thought can also be applied to add to the structuralist thought on agency. In this case, agency is not entirely limited by structure but depends on the particularities of social structure as they exist at a particular point in history. Post structuralist

like Foucault are interested in what makes discourses and interpretations of reality attain validity in the minds of people despite the gaps in meaning. How do people come to believe what they believe about sexuality ? How does scientific discourse gain its validity? How does punishment come to be accepted as an acceptable social system for ordering humans as good and bad ? These questions don't focus on the structures that produce this knowledge as much as they focus on how humans convert themselves into subjects of their own inquiry. These theories of subject is essential to understand agency . Post structuralist thought complicates agency and presents it as a matter of how individuals are constructed as subjects in different discourses. Agency and possibility of action does not exist as an absolute but only in the process that may or may not allow the agency of the subject. Now let us study Althusser and Foucault to further understand the positions taken by structuralist and post structuralists on the matter of social action.(11)

3.2Althusser: Ideology and ideological State Apparatuses

In "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" Marxist structuralist Althusser offers a critique of the limitations of Marxist theories in explaining the role of ideology in repression and class struggle. Althusser like many other Marxist thinkers during the middle of the 1950s were re reading Marx in the wake of the brutal Stalin regime in Soviet Union. The crushing of revolutions by the regime had to be understood and Marxist readings remained insufficient. Althusser in his critique of the Marxist theories on State realises that the state (representing upper class capitalist interest) exercises power on people not just by repression (i.e army, police etc) but also by ideology. The state apparatus include the "Repressive State Apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatus. Repressive State Apparatus uses domination whereas Ideological State Apparatus uses Ideology to preserve the interests of the state.

Marx talked of base and superstructure, with the base being the material conditions of production of resources and superstructure being political, legal and cultural aspects of society. Marx believed that superstructure was influenced by the material base but not entirely determined by it. Althusser doesn't disagree with Marx but states that superstructure that is the political, legal and cultural aspects of society does in fact have material existence. This where he insists on the importance of ideology in superstructure and its material existence.

Althusser first looks at how means of production, labour and the relations of production are reproduced by the state. In this he doesn't differ from other Marxist thinkers, except in the case of the reproduction of relations of production. This refers to the relations between the working class and the ruling class that maintains the systems of production. The ruling class can use both repression and ideology against the working class. These are called apparatuses as they are a part of the ruling class's tool kit for oppression. Repressive State Apparatuses uses violence and domination and these are represented by the prison, police, army and government. Ideological State Apparatus uses the ideology of the state to reproduce the exploitative relations of production.

Althusser recognises religious (church), legal, political, trade union, educational (school), family and communicational Ideological State Apparatuses. While the church used to be the predominant ideological state apparatus in earlier times, it has been substituted by the school. Schools in the pretext of teaching and ordering children, makes them subservient to the dominant ideology of the state. The values and morality that are taught to children in schools represent the ruling class's ideology. Althusser calls schools the most pervasive ideological state apparatus as they are guaranteed the audience of helpless children for many hours a day, every week for years until they become ideal adults and citizens for the state.

In order to understand how the ideological state apparatuses work, Althusser defines the structure of ideology. Ideology is defined as "representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence". Althusser clarifies that it is not the individual's understanding of their real world that is imaginary but their relation to it. For example, in a patriarchal society a husband beats and controls his wife and yet their marriage is intact. What makes the wife remain in the marriage? She can clearly understand that what she is going through is abuse, her suffering every day is very real. Her real condition is that of abuse but patriarchal ideology that has interpellated her successfully makes sure that she imagines her relation to these conditions of abuse as that of a rightfully obedient wife and not as a victim.

Althusser explains how ideology interpellates individuals as a subject and gives them their identity. Althusser claims that individuals are always already interpellated by ideology given the nature of its function. Thus unlike Freire's removal of false consciousness, there is no escaping Ideology. But Althusser doesn't say that the ruling class's ideology establishes itself as the dominant one in a simple process instead it arises out of continued class struggle and the reproduction of the relations of production. Even though mechanism of ideology and how it functions itself is abstract, the ideologies themselves are realised in the rituals and practises of the ideological state apparatuses. And this is set up amongst class struggles. Ideology is material in the sense that it is established via rituals and behaviours and real practices in society. For example, once you do the act of kneeling down and praying, you come to believe. The belief doesn't exist outside of the act itself or precede it.

3.3 Althusser on Subject

Althusser's subject is not the same as Freire's "Subject". While Freire's Subject was fully capable of transforming their conditions of existence, Althusser's subject is created by ideology. Such a subject is free to act only in so far as the dominant ideology of the state allows them to act. Althusser's subject is a subjected subject. The process of being subjected to an authority is the opposite of agency. Individuals are always already interpellated as subjects. Even before one is born, the anticipation of their birth and them taking on their father's name, has already made them into subjects in the world.

Althusser borrows from Lacan to explain the "mirroring" of subject by ideology. He offers the example of the religious subject. The religious subject is created when God/church interpellates the individual by hailing them as a believer. God hails the subject as his creation which helps him identify himself as a believer. But this process of creating subjects is presupposed by the existence of the ultimate Subject, that is God himself. Thus at the centre of the process of creating religious subjects is the Subject to which these subjects are subjected to. Here subjects refer to the regular believers and Subject refers to God. This is a double mirroring in the sense that God is reflected in believers in order to turn them into subjects and the subjects are made to believe that they are reflected in God by their subjection to him.

3.4 Althusser on agency and social action

Althusser's theory of ideology severely restricts agency and exposes it to be an illusion created by ideology so that a limited freedom offered by the state seems like real freedom. Even though ideology is eternal and universal, Althusser does leave room for its mutation. There will always be a general ideology but over time there may be different

particular ideologies. While Althusser doesn't allow for social action and agency in the same way as Freire does, he does recognise that the dominant state ideology will not always remain the same. Althusser has been criticised for being elitist and denying the agency of the working class and dooming the possibility of revolution. But this isn't justified fully as Althusser has clarified that the dominant state ideology is not fool proof. The basic tensions and contradictions of capitalism will eventually disrupt the dominant state ideology. Ideology is established by class struggle so it is possible for working class movements to develop an idea of how ideology works and use that scientific analysis of ideology as a means to challenge the state's monopoly on ideology. If workers are able to read Althusser's theory on ideology they can create a movement that can dismantle the absoluteness of the state's ideology. This doesn't mean the end of ideology, but it can be a beginning of proletariat ideology. Instead of being elitist, Althusser's theory on ideology is rooted in class struggle.

(12)

3.5 Foucault : The Subject and Power

“The Subject and Power” was written by Foucault as an afterword to a book on his work by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow called "Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics". This book aimed to understand the primary focus of Foucault's work. Foucault had objected to being labelled as structuralist and instead wanted his work to be recognised as primarily a theory on subject. Foucault recognises three ways in which subject is created in his work by processes of objectification. Let us first go back to the two meanings of the word “subject”. One is the acting subject or subject which is capable of having his or her subjective views of the world and the other is the “subjection” or “being subjected to authority. The complication here is that the process of subjecting to authority is

in itself objectifying and yet it creates subjects in its process of objectification . In Foucault's work subject can also mean how one subject oneself to an identity by self knowledge. That is the process of identity creation by self analysis is itself an act of subjection.

The three processes of objectification that Foucault lists include: objectification by the sciences like biology, grammar and philology. In Biology the human becomes the subject of study by the process of being alive . The second process is that of dividing subjects into good and bad and sane and insane. The third process is when subjects make themselves the object and by doing so creates themselves as subject. This is seen in his study of sexuality where people view themselves as subjects of their own sexuality.

Foucault chooses to study power because of the lack of attention given by scholars to the complex of power relations and its creation of subjects. Subjects are not just created by relations of production, or signification but also by power relations. Foucault seeks to understand power relations from the opposing strategies adopted by different groups. For example in order to understand sanity Foucault suggests that one should study insanity. Foucault identifies three types of power struggles : these are against domination, exploitation and subjection respectively. Domination refers to the absolute form of power that turns people into slaves. Exploitation refers to the exploitation of labour and removing and alienating people from what they produce.

It is the third kind of power struggle that is struggle against process of creating subjects that is of most relevance in the movements against the modern state. The modern state doesn't just employ domination or exploitation but it holds power that is at the same time individualising and totalitarian. State power is individualising in the same sense as pastoral or christian power is individualising. Pastoral power is focused on the salvation of

the individual. In similar ways in the name of welfare, the state individualises its people. State power is totalitarian because of its commitment to bring all people under the state.

Foucault proposes that for a movement against state power to work, people should start rejecting the various ways in which the state individualises its power and adopt their own processes of subjectivication. In order to understand how power is exercised Foucault urges us to focus on power relations and not just on relationships of communications. Power isn't exercised by complete domination, in fact for Foucault freedom is necessary for power. Power is defined as a structure of actions which regulates and constraints a set of possibilities of actions. Power is action upon action. Power is exercised through governing action which according to Foucault is to direct the conduct of individuals.

"When one defines the exercise of power as a mode of action upon the actions of others, when one characterises these actions by the government of men by other men-in the broadest sense of the term-one includes an important element: freedom. Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. ". For Foucault, inherent in all power relations is the possibility of resistance ; "At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom. Rather than speaking of an essential freedom, it would be better to speak of an "agonism"*-- of a relationship which is at the same time reciprocal in-citation and struggle, less of a face-to-face confrontation which paralyses both sides than a permanent provocation.." (Foucault,M). Foucault allows us to think about power as not something that the few on top has while others don't and instead points out that power is everywhere. Relations of power are constantly governing action. Freire's idea of power was that which is

the sole possession of the oppressor and Althusser's idea of power was that of State power, but Foucaultian power is distinct from both of them.

Foucault uses "governmentality" to explain the relational nature of power.

Governmentality refers to governments that govern with the consent and will of those being governed. In this system, people are not just subjects of sovereign law but they are able to discipline themselves by regulating their own conduct. Then the job of the government is to conduct the conduct of the people. Here the earlier conduct refers to organising and streamlining the actions of people. If power is action upon action the subject on whom the power is exerted must be able to act with a certain degree of freedom. Otherwise there would be no action by the subject for power to act upon. This is how freedom becomes a necessary condition for the existence of power relations.

3.6.Foucault on Agency and Social Action

Foucault doesn't allow for absolute agency but instead limits it by the processes that creates subjects. Individuals and their possibility for social action will be determined by the various discourses that make their subject positions. So the question is not so much of "having agency" but one can only be an agent in so far as allowed by the discourses that create the individuals's subjectivity. This is a post structuralist idea of agency in the sense that agency is not a matter of whether it can be possessed by the individual or created by structures in society, but it exists in the competing discourses of particular time and space. In his later work, Foucault emphasises self-care and self reflection as key to mastering one's own subjectivity. His essay on technology of the self is more liberal in giving more room for agency and the possibility of self analysis by individuals(13).

4. Post Positivist Realism and Activism

Post positivist realism refers to rejection of positivism while remaining grounded in the complicated ways in which people form their multifaceted identities in the real world. Post positivist realism encourages the oppressed to draw from their own experiences to determine their course of action. It looks at how social structures shapes identities but at the same time people constantly reshape the same social structures. A rejection of positivism and essentialism is necessary to not fall into the trap of making the assumption that the oppressed have an inherent access to their own value which is not governed by the forces that constantly suppresses them. But at the same time it is important to recognise their real abilities to form relationships with their reality that is conscious and can be transformational.

4.1 Giddens and Structuration Theory

Anthony Giddens and his structuration theory represents a radical return to the question of structure and agency and their relationship with each other. Giddens was a sociologist in training but wanted to develop a modern view of society that was consistent with modern philosophy as well. The core of structuration theory lies in the non primacy of structure and agency. Structure and agency are not constructs within themselves but constituted by constant social interaction. Giddens reviews Structuralism and identifies a few themes that is relevant to his theory on modern societies; He accepts the significance of structuring society by differences that is seen in the work of structuralists like Levi Strauss.

But he mounts a realist critique to this. Society according to Giddens is not just structured by relations of difference in a virtual space but it exists in a physical space as well.

Giddens reaffirms the need for historical analysis to understand social practices as opposed to those who views history as constantly changing and hence unavailable for analysis. Giddens criticises the lack of distinction structuralist make between “structure” and “system”. For Giddens , system refers to the pattern of relations that make up society and structure refers to the rules and regulations that social actors have to adhere to. Giddens accepts the critique of humanism offered by structuralists but warns against its complete negation of how discourse decides the reflexivity of human action. Social practices are not determined by external structure or by the subjectivity of the actor, instead they constantly remake these two. Agency and action and its relationship to structure is one of mutual dependence. This is the central thesis of the theory of structuration. (14)

Social structures are constantly made by the actions of agents in society and these structures cannot exist outside of this. Structures may regulate the rules and resources that govern action but they are not deterministic in nature. Giddens affords actors the ability to self actualise and respond to the symbols in society. Giddens describes “discursive consciousness “ while affirming the agency of actors in society. Discursive consciousness refers to the momentary consciousness that actors have to the problems in society and their ability to focus and transform them in order to reduce their own anxiety. This doesn’t mean that the actor is always doing an existential self analysis but this consciousness arises in moments and leads to actions that change the structures in society.(15)

4.2 Giddens on Ideology

Giddens traces the history of theory on ideology. Marxists who vouched for the end of ideology saw ideology as disillusionment. Althusser offers a theory on the structure of ideology itself. Giddens is less interested in the abstraction ideology and more interested in its manifestation in real society. This is where he says ideology is used by oppressors to attain legitimacy. Ideology according to him is also used to present sectarian views as universal ones. Ideology for Giddens is a symbol system which influences different people in different ways and in different contexts. He agrees with Althusser that Ideology is not false consciousness.

4.3 Critique of the Modern Capitalist State

Giddens talks of time and its role in the theory of structuration in modern societies. Before capitalism time belonged to the people and was dictated by the natural cycle of seasons but with the advent of capitalist states natural time got converted to clock time. This way the state controlled the people's perception of time. Time as dictated by the state is crucial to maintain work place discipline needed in modern labour which aims to maximise productivity. Thus the conditions of the capitalist society is not just maintained by the commodification of labour but also by the commodification of time. Another aspect of Giddens theorisations on the modern society is "space". In the earlier civilisations man was a part of the natural environment and its processes. But in capitalist societies man is preoccupied with creating artificial spaces for the means of productions. An analysis of cities as places of production, and its comparison to the country side can reveal this.

Giddens distinguishes some characteristics of the modern state from the traditional sovereign state. The traditional state often ruled on religious ideology to help sustain itself and its legitimacy but the modern state doesn't need religion to do the same. With the help of mass surveillance technology the state can directly control the lives of its citizens.

4.4 Giddens on Agency and Social Action

Giddens considers actors as capable of being aware of their processes of subjectification and reflexively monitoring their social conditions of existence. This reflexivity refers to the ability of actors to refer to themselves while analysing the social practices that constitute them as subjects. This is where Giddens vary from structuralists who severely limited the possibility of actors having knowledge of their conditions of existence in so far as how it constituted them. Giddens offers a sweet spot between the positivism of humanism and the restriction of structuralism.

Giddens' recognition of actors and structures as being made via social action is comparable to the post structuralist idea of subject being created by discourses. The main claim Giddens makes in structuration theory is that actors must know the systems and structures and society which constitutes them in order to be competent members of the same society. This is derived from what he calls “duality of structure”. Duality of structure refers to the fact that social structures are both the “medium and outcome of social practise”.

Actors may change social structure by acting non intentionally as well. This kind of disruption by actors is another way in which Giddens presents the idea of structuration, that is social practices constantly reproducing social structures while also being constituted by it. The structures of society provides rule and frameworks for specific kind of action and hence they cannot be characterised as entirely limiting action. Giddens is committed to the recovery of the active subject but is conscious enough on post structuralist theories of subject, to not fall into the trap of essentialism and subjectivism. The loophole he finds in this is the unintended consequences of the actions of the subject on structure and thereby also on themselves.

Giddens has been criticised for his inconsistency in defining agency. If all actions are self-conscious actions, then what makes the distinction between routine action and action directed at social transformation. It is ironic that Giddens aims for empowering people to act against exploitation and yet dilutes and generalises agency itself to such a degree that it loses its critical intention. This critical intention is necessary for agency to mean anything in the context of radical activism.(16)

4.5 Post Positivist Realist Theory of Identity

Another text that offers a post-positivist realist take on "identity" is Paula Moya's "Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism". The authors of this text intend to "reclaim identity from structuralists who negate it. Structuralist negation of identity rests on the assumption that people's identities are different in different historical contexts and hence one identity cannot be the sole director of political or social action. Moya gives the example of gender identity of a black slave woman in America and Victorian woman in England to display identity critic's point that identity is inconsistent and incoherent.

Moya analyses Chicana feminist Cherrie Moraga's writing on women of colour to make the point that identities and unique experiences of individuals cannot be cast off as product of discourses but instead the specific location of their identity, whether that is of race or gender will inform their political action. The experience of womanhood of the black slave woman and Victorian woman maybe different but this doesn't mean that it cannot produce individually, for each of those women, unique knowledge of their social location. Social location here refers to placing oneself in the complex of race, gender, class, sexuality and its interacting social reality. Moraga and other feminists argue that post-modernism negates the

position of women as knowledge producers themselves , in their critique of identity politics based on gender. Post positivist realist view offers an alternative to the extremist theory of identity provided by essentialists or post modernists. Essentialists argue that identities are inherent and fixed while post modernists talk of the constantly fragmented self. Post positive realists on the other hand focus on how race, sexuality or gender affect identity without it being fully deterministic. Moya proves this point by critiquing post modernist feminists critique of Moraga's writing on women of colour. Post modern critique of Moraga's work conveniently loses sight of its specific location and context.

Moraga's work on the specific experiences of women of colour in the cross section of gender and race, re-affirms the post positivist realist view that individuals can gain objective knowledge about the world and themselves from their unique cultural experience. After having affirmed the importance of identity in illuminating the specific location and context of social practices, Moya suggests that some identities may have more value than others. This is because some identities and their self analysis provides more knowledge about social structures than others do, and woman of colour is one of them.

Moya's thesis on post positivist reclaiming of identity is the most reassuring for the cause of social action, while remaining non essentialist. When compared to the structuralist and post structuralist thesis on social action and agency, Moya's thesis directly speaks to the activist and offers them theoretical and logical validity and foundation for framing their work.

(17)

5. Conclusion:

Theory for understanding social action is vast and varied. But one thing is certain, many attempts have been made over the years to offer critical ways of thinking about social action. Academia has offered people engaged in the difficult task of social transformation many theoretical tools. After having traced philosophies of humanism to post positivist realism, one cannot say a single consistent and coherent theory of social action has emerged but the study has sincerely attempted to capture the evolution of theory on the matter. The differences between humanism and every theory that followed it is easier to establish than those between structuralism, post structuralism and post positivist realism. This is understandable because negation of essentialism leads to all discussion on the subject of social action in to be in the abstract. But are there social movements that have directly benefited from the abstractions offered by theory ?

One example of a social movement that was directly influenced by theory was one that was situated in academia itself: the student movements of 1960s and early 1970s that that happened across America and Europe. The movements arose on university campuses against the university administrations and later grew to encompass other facets of society. There were student movements against Vietnam war, anti busing movements , gay liberation movements etc. In America , this was the same time a paradigm shift in theory on social action had happened. Collective action was no longer studied as aberrations but as those rooted in how people come to respond to the oppressive realities that social conditions put them in. This was

led by social scientists who themselves participated in the student protest movements. This is what makes the 1960s a great example for how theorists and activists coexist and collaborate.

What does this exercise on theory for activist mean for the activist on field ? It doesn't mean that the activist can afford to drop his task of transformation and look to theory for a manual of action. Any generalised theories on activism is forced to abstract vast complexity of society itself. Such abstractions while always useful in understanding certain patterns, will almost always fail in particular points of space and time. What theory gives the activist is the ability to place himself in the long history of thinking about social transformations. An activist who understands the nuances and limits of his own agency can easily appropriate the forces that mediate this agency. This becomes increasingly importantly in the current globalised world which offers many intersecting discourses on social action. In 2019, a large array of protests are happening all over the world. Pro democracy and anti state movements like those in Lebanon, Hong Kong, Sudan and more. The activists of today are more confident about the possibility of revolution because of their ability to place themselves and others in the complex of discourses that create society and culture.

While there maybe no one complete ideology or framework governing all people in mass movements like the ones we see today, we can see that large numbers of people are calling themselves activists because they can identify for themselves the ruptures in the system that oppresses them and has the intention and ability to change it. Theory can convert any individual into an activist, in the broadest and most complex sense of the word, because of its ability to help contextualise and recognise the complex processes in social systems. The act of theorising social action itself should give hope to any activist.

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