Resistance from the Margins: Shaping New Power Structures in India

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Introduction

Dissent has been at the centre of forming societies, defying authority, and transforming social narratives. In the present times, movements of resistance have been more critical as communities oppose structural violence, exclusion, and domination. Dissent is not, however, a uniting ideology; it is practiced in complex power relations that reinforce as well as disintegrate existing hierarchies. This research paper examines how marginalized communities Dalits, Adivasis, women, queer individuals, and indigenous people manoeuvre their agency, negotiate the imperatives of resistance, and reclaim the vocabulary of power. The phrase **"The Centre Cannot Hold" from W.B. Yeats' poem The Second Coming and later used by Chinua Achebe in Things Fall Apart** metaphorically expresses the breakdown of hegemonic powers (**Yeats, 1920; Achebe, 1958**). Resistance movements do not aim to dismantle the centre in the majority of instances; rather, they demand recognition, justice, and dignity along with re-establishing power dynamics. This piece of writing touches upon the growth of social movements, their presence in digital and cultural spaces, and challenges inherent in resistance.

Historical Trajectories of Dissent

Historically, dissent has taken **multiple forms, from large-scale revolutions to localized resistance efforts.** The Indian independence movement serves as a classic example of sustained resistance against colonial rule, with **Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent civil disobedience challenging British hegemony.** However, mainstream narratives often overshadow the role of marginalized groups, such as Dalit activists, Adivasi warriors, and women freedom fighters, who contributed to the movement but remain absent from dominant historical accounts (**Chandra, 2001**).

The Bhima-Koregaon war in 1818, in which Dalit soldiers took on the oppressive **Peshwa regime,** is now a representational figure of resistance against caste (**Jadhav, 2019**). Similarly, Adivasi uprisings like the **Santhal Rebellion (1855-56) and Birsa Munda's rebellion (1895-1900)** against British exploitation highlight indigenous resistance (**Soren, 2019**). These narratives are focused on highlighting that marginalized groups have been resisting systemic oppression for long periods, even when their struggle was excluded from the mainstream. Even the **Indian feminist movement** has also been greatly transformed. While **Savitribai Phule** was the pioneer in providing education to lower-caste and Dalit women in the 19th century, newer feminist movements also address intersectional issues and understand how gender oppression, caste oppression, and class oppression are connected to each other (**Patel, 2020**).

The Contribution of Digital Media to Resistance

The age of digital platforms has significantly influenced resistance movements since digital media enables the voice of marginalized communities. **Social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook** have now become pivotal in organizing movements, exposing injustice, and documenting grassroots activism (**Sharma, 2022**). Some of the caste studies of digital media are akin to the: **The #MeToo Movement in India** the global of this movement rang deeply within India, with survivors of sexual harassment testifying and naming their offenders (**Kamble, 2008**). The movement pulled to the forefront the power relations in working places, entertainment industries, and schools. The movement also introduced with it inherent hierarchies among feminism, under which **Dalit and Bahujan** views came to be peripheralized, forcing intersectional actions in online activism (**Revathi, 2010**). **#DalitLivesMatter and Caste-Based Oppression** borrowed from the inspiration of the Black Lives Matter campaign, the tag **#DalitLivesMatter** emerged in response to India's caste-based violence (**Khan, 2021**). It placed in the limelight incidents like the **Hathras rape case in 2020** and institutionally rooted discrimination against Dalit communities in schools, workplaces, and police stations. Online campaigns played a key role in mobilizing judicial and social remedies (**Patel, 2020**). **Environmental Resistance and Online Activism** indigenous groups and environmental movements have employed cyberspace as a platform against mass deforestation and mining operations. **The Save Aarey Movement in Mumbai and the Char Dham Project protests in Uttarakhand** demonstrated how online mobilization could translate into physical action (**Sharma, 2022**). Digital spaces, too, are vulnerable to

state surveillance, disinformation, and censorship, and questions are raised about the limits of digital dissent.

Art as Resistance: Visual and Literary Narratives

Art has been a powerful instrument of resistance for many years, enabling oppressed groups to speak their struggle in a form that transcends the usual political accounts. Through images and photography, literature and film, art has challenged dominant narratives and reconstructed cultural memory (**Khan, 2021**). Examples of the Visual Representation of Dissent include: **Street Art and Protest Murals:** Graffiti murals in the cities of Delhi and Kolkata are now potent forms of resistance. **Shaheen Bagh demonstrations (2019-2020)** against the **Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)** witnessed colourful protest art, from women's bodies to revolutionary poems and anti-fascist graffiti, turning the cityscapes into spaces of resistance (**Sharma, 2022**). **Photography as Testimony: Photojournalism** has played a crucial role in capturing state violence, from police brutality against farmers during the 2020-21 farmers' protests to the displacement of Adivasi communities for corporate land acquisitiveness (**Sinha, 2017**). Cinema and Politics of Storytelling: **Cine movies such as Article 15 (2019) and Jai Bhim (2021)** have also touched upon problems of oppressions of caste, but regional films also keep representing tales of resistance by the native and Dalits that are being avoided by Bollywood.

Power of Literature to Oppose Status Quo

Literature has long been a powerful tool to challenge the status quo, especially through marginalized voices. In the Indian context, Dalit life-writings like **B.R. Ambedkar's Annihilation of Caste and Omprakash Valmiki's Joothan** offer firsthand accounts of caste discrimination, acting as counter-histories to mainstream, Brahminical narratives (**Ambedkar, 1948; Valmiki, 2003**). These works expose the harsh realities of caste oppression and challenge social inequalities. Other prominent **Dalit literature, such as Bama's Karukku and Baby Kamble's The Prisons We Broke,** continue to criticize institutionalized oppression and the Dalitization of oppression (**Bama, 2000; Kamble, 2008**). Indian feminist and queer writing also critique patriarchal and colonial power structures. Feminist and gender-critical texts by authors such as **Urmila Pawar in Aaydan and Priya Parmar in The Indian Feminist** Revisited challenge gendered oppression, and feminist literature by writers such as **Kamala Das** in My Story challenges traditional notions of gender and sexuality (**Pawar, 2014; Parmar, 2020;**

Das, 1976). In the queer literature world, **The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life by A. Revathi** presents the lives of transgender individuals in India, defying gender and identity norms of society(**Revathi, 2010**). Other postcolonial works such as **Midnight's Children by Salman Rushdie and The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy** criticize the enduring legacy of colonialism and social injustice on Indian culture and identity (**Rushdie, 1981; Roy, 1997**). These works, along with those mentioned, serve as potent forms of resistance, questioning oppressive systems and advocating for a more inclusive, just society.

Challenges in Resistance Movements

Even with their revolutionary promise, social movements are always faced with internal contradictions and domination by powerful groups. **Hierarchies Within Movements:** Social movements would like to think of themselves as having open arms, yet there are internal hierarchies. **Intellectual upper-castes controlling Dalit activism,** or queer and trans exclusion from feminist discourse, challenges who gets to define dissent (**Patel, 2020**). **Dilution of Revolutionary Vision:** Political intentions of the majority of movements are very clear and over time become diluted. **Environmental activism,** for example, originally began as an anti-capitalist critique, yet is more and more dominated by corporate interests pushing **"green capitalism" (Sinha, 2017).** State **Repression and Criminalization of Opposition:** Across the globe, states repress protest through sedition laws, shutdowns of the internet, and police raids. In India, **the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)** has been invoked against activists, journalists, and students and criminalized dissent for national security purposes (**Sharma, 2022**).

The Role of Political Education and Affirmative Action in Indian Politics

Political education plays a key role in raising the awareness of marginalized sections on their rights, political process, and active participation in democratic activities. It empowers people to challenge existing power relations and fight for social transformation. **Affirmative action** through reservation policies has been one of the principal tools for the empowerment of underprivileged groups like Dalits, Adivasis, and women in India, providing them with representation in education, employment, and politics. **Systemic hurdles** like caste-based discrimination, patriarchal systems, and economic inequalities continue to inhibit the complete enactment of these provisions. Political education, coupled with affirmative action, is critical towards empowering marginalized groups effectively to cross such barriers. Even though the policies exist, poor implementation, social stigma, and pervasive power

relations mostly render the benefits least optimally available for the most desperate. Bypassing these challenges is not merely a matter of policy change but attitude modification in society toward the groups at the periphery so they are listened to and their plight appreciated (**Ambedkar, 1948; Patel, 2020**).

Systemic Barriers in Indian Politics and the Need for Reform

To minimize systemic barriers in Indian politics and society, the government can do a number of things practically. **Mass sensitization** campaigns at the caste and gender level across the country can go a long way in deconstructing prejudices, particularly among government administrators, teachers, and the police. **Enhanced political representation** of the marginalized through providing them reserved seats in the local and state legislatures and convincing parties to nominate more candidates from the groups is necessary in order to give voice to them. **Leadership development and scholarships** for marginalized communities to empower them politically in their mobilization can also increase their participation. **Improving the access to justice,** especially in matters such as land rights and employment, and providing legal aid to marginalized communities is also critical**. Reforming the education system** to include social justice rhetoric in the curriculum and providing scholarships to marginalized students will eradicate structural barriers (**Jadhav, 2019; Sinha, 2017**). In addition, **economic opportunity-narrowing** policies such as **subsidies** in the form of shelter and health and assistance to small businesses of the marginalized group can provide more equitable opportunity (**Kamble, 2008**). **Local institutions** such as **Panchayats** being made stronger and decentralization of power will ensure more representative and more inclusive decision-making, keeping in view the particular needs of the marginalized group. These steps, when put in place, would work to decimate system barriers, become more inclusive, and construct a more inclusive society.

A policy of pragmatic implementation to fight system barriers at the grassroots would focus on the creation of **Inclusive Development Zones (IDZs)** in backwater areas. IDZs would be designated areas wherein focused efforts in **education, health, employment, and political empowerment** are undertaken. In IDZs, a **percentage of government and private sector jobs** would be set aside for Dalits, Adivasis, women and other weaker sections. Local governments would have to offer **scholarships, vocational training, and legal aid so that access to justice and opportunities** can be made possible**. Panchayats** would also be sensitized on caste and gender in addition to education so that **inclusive decision-making** can be facilitated. This policy would guarantee that individuals in such communities have access to support that is particularly tailored to their needs, fostering a more

equitable environment and eradicating systemic barriers by focusing on economic and social empowerment (**Patel, 2020; Revathi, 2010**).

Conclusion

Ultimately**, dissent** is more than just a resistance; it is an energy for imagination, change, and reconfiguring relations of power. As the new movements continue to appear, it becomes important to face up to and overcome the internal hierarchies and contradictions within them so that marginalized voices remain ever at the centre. The title **"The Centre Cannot Hold"** represents not only the collapse of established orders but also heralds the emergence of new political, social, and cultural possibilities. In this regard, opposition becomes not just an act of contradiction it becomes an arena where alternative types of organization and thinking begin to emerge, and where those **hitherto marginalized in mainstream ideology** can begin to plot their own future. With practice, it has come to be seen that opposition from the periphery can begin to remake and transform the very centre itself. This remaking of the centre is one that upsets established power relations and gives new vision to how society is to be organized. Resistance, then, must not merely be a reaction against oppression but also inclusive, self-reflective, and progressive. It must provide space for the erased and suppressed voices and histories to speak for themselves, to become empowered so that they may reclaim their own stories. In so doing, resistance is a rewriting of history and imagining of the future in which the marginalized are no longer relegated to the edges but are at the centre of building a more equitable and just world (**Roy, 1997; Rushdie, 1981**).

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