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Deconstructing the classics of Resistance : "The Wretched of the Earth" and "Pedagogy of the Oppressed"

This article, presents a critical evaluation, of two books ; Fanon's (1965) "**The Wretched of the Earth**" and Freire's (1970) **"Pedagogy of the Oppressed**". While Freire's book is in form of essay; Fanon's book is a hybrid of essay, social philosophy, poetic imagery, and psychological case studies.

2. TEXTS OF RESISTANCE

Both the books, under review are, classic texts of resistance of Third World against colonial oppression. Fanon's book is a combative text, written from the experiences of direct involvement, in Algerian revolution during late 1950s; it is a work of social revolution, in live blood and flesh form. Freire abstracts colonialism, coloniser, and colonised as oppression, oppressor, and oppressed, respectively. Most interesting aspect of both the writers, is their use of Marxist conception of dialectical inter-play of Subject and Object, to explain their narratives, through dialectic of "Coloniser (settler)-Colonised (native)" by Fanon, and "Oppressor (metropolitan)-Oppressed (periphery)" by Freire.

*"*Colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state, and it will yield when confronted with greater violence*"* (Fanon 1965:48). For Fanon, colonialism is violence, political, military, cultural, and psychic, which can be eradicated only by counter-violence. Fanon was concerned to overthrow, the exploitative colonial power, by force so that, the colonised Self achieves liberation and authentic humanity in the process. His strength lies in constantly unveiling the

psychological degradation of “native”, as a consequence of colonial exploitation. For him, “the colonised Blacks” are the quintessential proletariat, whose historical Mission it is, to overthrow colonialism, by violence."

Freire echoes Fanon in this regard, “ Where as the violence of the oppressors prevents the oppressed from being fully human, the response of the latter to this violence is grounded in the desire to pursue the right to be fully human”(Freire 1970 :38). In the post-colonial world, we are living in today, it may sound horrifying to ‘bourgeoisie rationality’, that both these anti-imperialist theorists, advocate violence as humanising force, as a vehicle of liberation from the yoke of colonialism. Some may object to the fact that this kind of analysis is a way of ‘naturalising’ colonialism. But these authors, excavate the historical background of colonialism, as a mechanism of depositing terror and perpetuating violence, in every day life, of native. Violence, metaphorically thus, can be understood as the way to overcome the gap between Subject’s power and Object’s powerlessness. “ At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect”(Fanon 1965:74).

Fanon, sketches the topography of colonial world, with compartmentalisation of life, represented by settlers’ bungalows and native’s quarters, with police and army depositing terror and violence in natives’ bones. He charts out the course of decolonisation by persistently pointing out the divide between ‘nationalist bourgeoisie’ in Algeria and ‘liberationist movement’, pointing out the time-lag and rhythm-difference between leaders and masses. Fanon presents Colonialism and Nationalism in a kind of mutual contest, in the struggle for political independence of colonised people.

Fanon is sceptical of ‘national bourgeoisie’ and considers peasants as the true revolutionary class, who in combination with radical leaders thrown out of mainstream nationalist party, are in a position to carry out the

revolution. Fanon, sees nationalism as a phenomenon of common history of the Coloniser and the Colonised and traces the genesis of nationalism to the ideas propagated by western education in the native country. He says, " History teaches us clearly that the battle against colonialism does not run straight away on the lines of nationalism ...if you really wish your country to avoid regression, a rapid step must be taken from national consciousness to political and social consciousness"(Fanon 1965:118).

Fanon, draws on the entire operational framework of working of imperial hegemony, since mercantile era and shows how the colonies were exploited to provide cheap raw materials and labour as well as market for the industrial revolution of Europe. He characteristically summarises as , "Europe is literally the creation of the Third World. The wealth which smothers her is that which was stolen from the under developed countries" (Fanon 1965:81), and visualises continuation of the economic imperialism in post-colonial era as well.

Freire also ,sees the condition of Third World countries as dual societies, which continue to be dependent on ex-colonialist countries, "The metropolitan society has no option other than conquest, manipulation, economic and cultural (and sometimes military) invasion of the dependent society--an invasion in which the elite leaders of the dominated society to a large extent act as mere brokers for the leaders of the metropolitan society" (Freire 1970 :143).

3. NARRATIVES OF LIBERATION

The books under review, are not only texts of resistance, they are powerful narratives of liberation of vast majority of humanity subjugated for centuries under imperial hegemony. Both the writers find national independence, without social revolution, of little significance in bringing about fundamental transformation of decolonised societies. Therefore, they emphasise the necessity

of raising social conciouseness of people as the means of achieving liberation. Liberation, not independence, is the essence of decolonisation, which is a process of socio-cultural and economic regeneration of Third World societies. Both the authors argue that the process of revolution is humanising, in which masses regain their 'lost' humanity.

While Freire, recognises the problematic of 'oppressive reality', and therefore the need for constant conscientization, reflection and action to carry out the liberation of oppressed people. According to Fanon, "decolonisation ...transforms spectators crushed with their enessentiality, into privileged actors, with grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them...the 'thing' which has been colonised becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself" (Fanon 1965:28).

Basic divergence between the two authors lies in their assessment about the 'dynamics' of revolution. While Fanon believes that the very oppressive system of colonialism creates its own collapse, with 'colonised natives' spontaneously overthrowing the inhuman and exploitative system. Freire differs and makes fundamental departure from Fanon by arguing that 'oppressive reality' is deeply embedded in the every day existence of oppressed people and shapes their consciousness; conditions them in such a way that oppressed people get submerged in it, "One of the gravest obstacles to achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings' consciousness" (Freire :1970:33). In fact, central theme of Freire's book, is the concept of 'conscientizacao', which means the process of learning to 'perceive' and 'read' oppressive elements of social, political and economic reality and to take action to transform the same.

In view of the submersion of people in their oppression, exploitation and misery, it is essential that people are made aware of their

existential problems. Therefore, Freire proposes the praxis of social revolution, which consists of critical conscientisation, naming the problem, reflecting on the problem as a dynamic reality and not a fixed state and finally confronting the problem by revolutionary action to transform it. “ It is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with increasing critical awareness of their roles as Subject of transformation” (Freire 1970:108).

Freire, therefore analyses the question of ‘ conscientisation’ in detail and focuses on the need of transformation of oppressed people from the state of known and acted upon objects to Knowing and Acting Subjects. He dwells at length on the subject-object dialectic and proposes the need of sensitisation, mobilisation and organisation of people as the essential step of liberation. “ Unless it liberates, it is no revolution, the taking of power is only one moment---no matter how decisive--in the revolutionary process” (Freire 1970:117).

4. CULTURE AS DIALOGUE OF REVOLUTION

Fanon highlights the moral decay and corruption of native elite and rise of ethnicity and feudal conflicts after independence, which distort the second phase of decolonisation, that is , liberation. While Fanon diagnoses the pathologies of colonialism, exploitation, and oppression, he does not provide the methodology of achieving real liberation and overcoming the pitfalls of revolution. In this regard , Freire’s book can be considered as complementary to Fanon’s book. Freire prescribes the methodology of Dialogical Cultural Action as the way out, “ I interpret the revolutionary process as Dialogical Cultural Action, which is prolonged in, ‘cultural revolution’ once power is taken...in this way as both leaders and people continue their critical activity, the revolution will more

easily be able to defend itself against bureaucratic tendencies (which lead to new forms of oppression) and against invasion" (Freire 1970 :141).

Both the authors, emphasise the need of national culture in the process of liberation. Colonialism is not merely physical occupation of native territory, rather it subjugates the tradition, heritage, language, customs and thereby culture of people, and their very identity. " By the time a century or two of exploitation has passed, there comes about a veritable emaciation of the stock of national culture...the poverty of the people, national oppression and the inhibition of Culture are one and the same thing"(Fanon 1965:191).

Freire considers 'dialogue' as radical necessity of authentic revolution and liberation, which involves interdependent and synergetic participation of leaders as well as masses in every activity of socio-cultural and economic regeneration of decolonised societies. Both the writers are seized with the magnitude of problem of liberation and emphasise that liberation, is an unending process, keeping in view the historical damage done to culture, psyche, economy and polity of decolonised societies.

5. CONCLUSION

Both the writers, Fanon and Freire, are pioneers of anti-imperialist theory of liberation and have provided inspiration for liberation movements in Third World. Fanon's "The Wretched of the Earth" is classic text of economic and psychological degradation inflicted by colonial powers on the natives. Fanon's narrative, combats both imperialism and formalistic identitarian nationalism. He makes use of decentering ideas of Marx, Neitzsche and Sartre in exposing the socio-cultural and psychic consequences of Colonialism. Fanon emerges from his direct involvement in Algerian revolution and surveys the

predicament of Third World in general and he does it with vibrating and burning passion.

However, Fanon's book does not offer the prescription of transition after decolonisation; of moral authority of new power, and avoiding pitfalls of revolution. Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", completes the unfinished task of Fanon; he almost starts from where Fanon ends. Freire's book, is a masterpiece of radical political education. His pedagogy of conscientisation, praxis of social revolution and dialogical cultural action, offer the methodology of transcending pathologies of power and defending against the pitfalls of revolution and liberation. Freire's book is a vehicle for the oppressed to "read" their socio-economic and political reality, to develop critical consciousness of how 'system' victimises and how to take transformative action to change, the oppressive reality of their life and in turn, the surrounding world.

In view of the discussion and analysis in this article, in my opinion, both the books, are extraordinary works of creativity, humanism, social revolution and social philosophy. Fanon and Freire, both, are primarily concerned with ontological vocation of Man to be a Subject and in regaining the 'lost humanity' of vast majority of 'wretched of the earth'. To sum up, while Fanon's book is a great political document of our times ; Freire's book is an educational masterpiece.

REFERENCES

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