

Book Review

Johansson, A, & Vinthagen, S. (2020). *Conceptualizing Everyday Resistance: A transdisciplinary Approach*. Routledge: New York and London. 348 pp. Rs. 4027.

In the present times, everything has been politicised. Either seemingly apolitical behaviours like choices of food and dress or rather political choices of boycotts, writings and speech, each action has its own politics. Hence, in a world of dynamic political relationships, it becomes more important than ever before to keep ourselves aware of new forms of resistance and to defy traditional means of resistance.

The book “*Conceptualizing Everyday Resistance: A transdisciplinary Approach*” by Anna Johansson and Stellan Vinthagen focuses on “everyday resistance”, where people engage with power relations in their daily lives. It attempts to capture the patterns or gestures of resistance at informal gatherings and networks of resistance where they face collision with power. These patterns are often not perceived as a part of politics in any conventional sense and hence remain invisible to mainstream politics, society or science. (p.3).

Anna Johansson is a Lecturer of Sociology at the Department of Social and Behavioural Studies, University West, Sweden. Her areas of interest include resistance studies, critical fat studies and gender studies. Stellan Vinthagen is a Professor and Endowed Chair at the Study of Nonviolent Direct Action and Civil Resistance at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. He is also a Co-Leader of the Resistance Studies Group at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden and co-founder of the Resistance Studies Network. His research is focused on resistance, power, social movements, nonviolent action, conflict transformation and social change.

From 1980 onwards “resistance” became a major attraction in academic dialogue. There are lots of single case studies and edited works that bring together the views of different scholars across the globe. Much of the research that has emerged so far, particularly during the last decade, is primarily based on case studies, focused mainly within areas of subaltern, feminist, cultural, queer, peasant and post-structural

studies. But specialized and systematic research on “resistance” is still uncommon, it is still fragmented and emerging, and there are many areas where we need to find the basis for the translation and communication to grasp the concept better. Since the introduction of James Scott work *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), a new area of interest within the resistance studies i.e “everyday resistance” became a major issue in academic research. This is an informal and non-organized resistance, to which Scott categorised as ‘infra-politics’ or ‘an art of being ungoverned’. Anna Johansson and Stellan Vinthagen focus on this area in this book and try to scrutinize everyday resistance in context of time and, space, and also, how it engages with a variation actors, techniques and discourses. This work will help us to understand how everyday resistance varies between contexts, how it connects to collective actions or social movement activism, how it might scale-up and spread, and last but not least how it impacts social change, etc.

Where the first part of the book helps us to know the basic concepts and assumptions around theoretical understanding of “resistance”, “everyday resistance” and “power” in the second part the authors engage in elaborating their own analytical framework to study everyday resistance. But before going into that lets begin with what is everyday resistance, how people perceive it and what the authors say about its exclusive characteristics.

Johansson and Vinthagen argue that resistance is both a popular as well as a largely misunderstood concept. Though it is frequently conjured, in day to day talks, in media just as in the scholarly community, and then subsequently identified as a limited phenomenon. It is sometimes seen as a progressive reaction and at other times reactive. Where resistance led by a group which threaten powerful elites is opposed, while the courage shown by an individual who refuses to participate in atrocities is generally admired. There are others who romanticise the idea of resistance and acknowledge it as a process of liberation of those who live at the bottom of the society. This works helps us know the variant forms of resistance in everyday life but remain ungoverned and unrecognised, (p.2).

Everyday resistance is different from formally organised resistance: - Its located in the actions of subordinate actors and denotes acts by people in daily routines that might undermine power. (p.5) This form of resistance can be both individual or collective but it requires neither organised structure nor political platform to convey its message. It's rooted in the daily lives of subordinates as a normality rather than as dramatic or strange as assumed. (p.24) This everyday resistance involves anything that an individual as well as a collective do covertly in opposition and for self-help against domination. Here the identity of the resister is kept secret or even the whole act is kept concealed, (p.26). It includes those acts and gestures that could not be treated as a direct or open challenge, (p.26). Hence it is not easily recognised like movements and mass resistance since, it's a particular hidden and disguised method, individual and not politically articulated, (p.30). Such exclusive characteristics makes it's tracing difficult and pose a challenge even in academic research, (p.5). This book opens up the heterogeneousness of social and political associations and theorise how power operates not just from above but also horizontally and from below.

Everyday resistance does not mean that it has no association with the organised form of resistance, the authors emphasise that one form of resistance actually compliments, and inspires the other form of resistance. Existence of everyday resistance often provides a mediating ground for the projection of open rebellion and mass mobilization, particularly when it is supported by organisations leading on the front. This also strengthens the network and connection among those who are active as a resistant at ground level and those who lead the agenda or resistance movement at state or provincial level. And also connect the informal and scattered form of resistance which people lead of their own in their daily life, at workplace, neighbourhood, families and at kind of public gathering which we easily identify as resistance. The chain which connects everyday resistance to organised mass mobilisation can be marked as a culture of resistance, (p.2). Basically, the authors argue that waves of mass mobilisation can be fed into daily form of resistance or vice versa, in a way that both forms act as an inspiration or complimentary to the other, (p.2).

The exclusivity of everyday resistance lies in the fact that, though it is of self-help character and involves acts that do not conform to conventional understandings of politics but at the same time it does represent a political category as it involves variant gradients of intensity, exposure, engagement against claims and intentionality, (p.24). It does not include direct leadership from more organised trade union organisations, or facilitates formal negotiation of work condition, but it undoubtedly compliments it, which subsequently encourage the class-war. Also, it has a potential to secure material and symbolic gains such as dignity for the workers which often organised actions fail to ensure, (p.2).

This book seeks to find ways to analyse everyday resistance by asking questions: Who, where, when and how is the process of everyday resistance being implemented in relationships? This kind of scrutiny is essential to understand complex situations. This book avoids the simple categorisations and rather engages to unthread a more complex relationship between everyday resistance and power structures. It provides a theoretical and methodological framework to facilitate empirical studies in different research fields focusing on everyday resistance. It aims to answer various curiosities that surround the concept of everyday resistance. Like how to define everyday resistance in a more meaningful sense by avoiding restrictions and compartmentalisations to bring forward its creativity; and innovations. The authors emphasise that those who are engaged in everyday resistance are not necessarily politically motivated. Resisters might instead be led by desires, needs, affects or intentions that can be hard to define as political. The authors claim it is enough with merely the possibility of a success or effect of an act to undermine power to categorise it as a part of everyday resistance, (p.3).

Key elements and debates around which this book moves and opens our vision includes

How the definition of "resistance" and "Everyday resistance", varies according to the intentions, motivations or consciousness of the resistant and how each definition serves a different purpose. How power and resistance are intrinsically linked in opposition duality. Can we separate the resistance from power not only analytically but also empirically? Is

resistance linked to a multiple power structure simultaneously? (p.9). Though the book does not concentrate on discussing the empirical effects and impact of specific cases on everyday resistance as it is not based on case study. but what makes this work unique is that it incorporates and engages with core ideas e.g. structuralism, poststructuralism, Marxism, feminism, postcolonial studies, peasant studies, etc. With such an analytical approach it has created a huge scope or space in contemporary social sciences and opened it for utilization for the authors of variant research fields, (p.11). Key elements in the analytical framework are forms, actors, sites and strategies, (p.10). where authors' tried to read the everyday resistance in context of time, space and relations, and how it engaged different actors, techniques and discourses. Book is helpful, in not just having a theoretical and conceptual understanding of everyday resistance, but also understanding or giving insight into various competing theoretical aspects such as "hidden transcripts", "infra-politics", "off-kilter resistance" and "tactics of the weak, (p. 9, 31). It discusses everyday resistance in relation to other contested concepts such as: body, emotions, bio-politics, social change, etc.

Though authors acknowledged the contribution of James Scott in setting the relation and interconnection between certain forms of resistance and certain dimensions of power and with this making us understand how variations in power as well as everyday resistance are interdependent. However, authors also identified serious flaws in his work, Scott analysis is based on structuralist and Marxist approach, but in the field of resistance studies post-structuralist is the approach used most. Authors themselves used a post structuralist approach in this work. They adopted a Foucauldian perspective of power, which is 'universal' than 'local', 'productive' than 'repressive' and rational than 'reified'. They argue that Power and resistance are two components that engage in complex interplay with one another. (p.88)

Fundamental argument author made in this book that it's impossible to fully understand the resistance outside the realm of power. Because as Foucault says "Where there is power, there is resistance". Resistance occurs in opposition of something, in order to resist some power or domination, therefore its understanding is incomplete or impossible

without taking power structure into account. One needs to analyse everyday resistance in relation to its ongoing struggle with power. (p.4, 79) However, it does not mean that resistance cannot break such relations but more precisely, this work has suggest that though we could distinguish the two for clear cut definition what is power and what is resistance, however in the real and practical world the two formed a formed a complex configuration or dynamics, which can be mixed and mutually hybrid. (p.6). In Vinthagen words power and resistance are not the dichotomous phenomenon that often collide. Resistance is always related to power and power is plural. As Foucault saw power relation as a multiple process and a dynamic relationship, authors ask its readers to view resistance with the same sense.

According to them, the relationship between dominant and subaltern in context of power as well as resistance varies and is negotiated continually in different contexts and interactional settings, also past experience and material work as footsteps to build new resistance as well as shape power structure. Relation between the two is oppositional and repetitive mode, includes actions and reactions that need to be grasped as dynamic interaction played out in history, space and context that produce unpredicted results. Stories, myths, symbols, structures and tools of the early resistance worked as source material and footprints to make new resistance innovative, experimental and creative. It helps rebels to translate the hegemonic elements, on the other hand power structure also undergoes remodulation and redefine it after its experience of collisions with resistants. hence both power and resistance are intimately interrelated and produced in a continuous process.(p.6) however the acts of negotiation in everyday resistance might not explicit, but implicit and indirect (p.7), in the process both of them become entangled and consequently it has been observed that this often resulted in elements of resistance within power structure and elements of power within resistance projects. In this way power and resistance influence each other, that live side by side, and develop together. Understanding of this entanglement is needed not just to understand what constitutes resistance but it will enlighten us about the pattern in which resistance operates, when and how, partially or fully it intertwined power. This configuration

would also reveal rules, ideas, institutes and techniques when maintained to achieve its goal.

Also, one has to keep this in mind that subordinates by resisting produce both resistance as well as power. Also, everyday resistance has to be understood as intersectionality, as rooted in concurrent combinations of several powers. Here authors emphasised that an agent of resistance where on the one hand promotes power loaded discourse, on the other are bearer of both hierarchies as well as stereotypes and stand for a change. This means an actor is both exerciser of power and a subject on which power is imposed. (P.6) In everyday resistance individuals as well as collectives, both placed themselves in various positions, creating different identities in relation to one another or in relation to the dominant. This played a vital role in deciding the path and intensity of resistance as it varies as per the position within different hierarchical orders, types of agent (individual/collective), and the way they contact and interact in particular context and situation and the kind of relation they shared. This relational pattern often encourages resistants to resist one power while embracing or enforcing another one as their strategy to make resistance stronger and more forceful. (p.73) Similarly, they also tend to lose and adopt different features of resistance according to its influence over power. This enables resistants to make choices over how and what to resist.

Despite its complexities and ambiguities, everyday resistance is an essential category to unthread social relations in any political process, and specially, during peacebuilding and the reconstruction of state authority. This work opened the ground for retrospectively the relations of domination not in the organised structural and formal politics, but in the everyday relations of the workplace, village life and at the home. Also, this study has cleared us that we need to study power and resistance as a combination in its historical entanglement, where both of them intertwined, blended, mixed and even constitute each other, rather as a dichotomy of separated or “clean” categories. In this way Everyday resistance is a matter of analysis to see how this entanglement is changing within the everyday routine of subalterns. (p.63)

The book is relevant to anyone of those engaged in studies of democracy, development, peace, social change, bio-politics, body, identity-politics, everyday resistance, globalization and/or different shapes of power, mariginal groups included women, queer people, refugees or ethnic minorities, etc. Also, this book would also attract the activists and other theory-interested, non-scholarly readers.

Dr. Vaishali,

PhD from Department of History,
University of Delhi, India.