



“On Defining an Intellectual: The Postcolonial Chapter”

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ABSTRACT

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

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