

Transformation of Knowledge to Legitimize Power Relations: Representations in the Narratives

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Abstract

Michel Foucault's concept of power and knowledge are not isolated system but interlinked and reinforce each other. Knowledge is both a product of power and a means to legitimize power. To exercise power, knowledge must be transformed accordingly. Knowledge is the means that links the ruler with the ruled. It is shaped and moulded to exercise power relations through the most authentic medium, that is, text. According to Foucault, power is not only repressive but also productive in controlling social norms and individual behaviour. Power operates at all levels of the society and influences social behaviour and interaction. Knowledge can be transformed in both ways – to exert power or to resist power. Knowledge exists everywhere. Unlike other theories, which see power as repressive, Foucault thinks that power is productive in shaping identity and social norms through knowledge creation. Who controls knowledge, also influence what is accepted as truth, thus, reinforcing their power? This paper aims to study how knowledge in all social forms exerts power and resist power. This paper investigates how the narratives serve the power relations by transforming the truth in modifying the knowledge.

Keywords: *Knowledge, truth, power relation, episteme, discourse*

Introduction:

“Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

- Lord Acton (1887).

The danger of unchecked authority diminishes the society and suppresses the marginalized voices. Transformation of knowledge to legitimize power relation is the sharpest tool that the authority can deploy. Caricature of the facts and transformation of the knowledge by the authority to control the entire system, is the most effective tool. Power prevails in the society in all forms. Irrespective of gender, race and social hierarchy power exerts its authority to dominate and subjugate. Michel Foucault in his book *The Order of Things* (1966) has given the examples of Renaissance, Classical and Modern periods explaining the differences and transformations of knowledge and how they are shaped according to the power relations. In the Renaissance period the objects were similarity based, and hence delivered the knowledge. For example, the macrocosm and the microcosm. By the classical age in the seventeenth century knowledge had begun to shift towards classification and categorization. In the eighteenth century and nineteenth century, the knowledge was shaped by the emergence of the disciplines like psychology, philosophy and economics which shaped the knowledge systems influenced by power relations. The Western world transformed the knowledge of the Orient as the regressive society to the outer world. The patriarchal society has transformed the characters of the women in literature as witches and demons. This transformation simply legitimizes the supremacy of the patriarchal society. The transformation of the Africans into slavery legitimizes the white supremacy. The suppression of the colonized as primitive legitimizes the colonial authority of the Europeans. The imitation of the Western world justifies the eurocentrism. The domination over the environment through anthropocentrism justifies the destruction of the environment. So, the transformation of knowledge to exert Power is present in every form and community of the society. This paper aims to investigate the justification of the power relations by transformation of the knowledge in the society. This paper aims to investigate the representations of the power relations to the others by the most effective tool transformation of knowledge in the narratives. This paper will enquire how absolute power creates relative knowledge. *The Hungry Tide* (2004) by Amitav Ghosh, *The*

Animal's People(2007) by Indira Sinha, *The Last Wave*(2014) by Pankaj Sekhsaria has been selected to show different forms of power relations in different aspects of the society.

Literature Review:

The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power (Foucault, 1972, p.52).

Power must be analysed as something which circulates or as something which only functions in the form of a chain (Foucault, 1972, p.98).

I hardly ever use the word power and if I do sometimes it is always a shortcut to the expression of the use the relationships of power (Foucault, 1972, p.11).

It is this (sovereign notion of power) that we must break free of, if we wish to analyse power within the concrete and historical framework of its operation (Foucault, 1969, p.90).

Power is exercised only over free subjects and only insofar as they are free (Foucault, 1969, p.98).

My objective has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made into subjects (Foucault, 1966, p.208).

Just suppose we crossed that imaginary line that prevents us from deciding that no other species matters accept ourselves (Ghosh, 2004, p.301).

Definition of the terms:

Knowledge: Different philosophers have given different definitions of knowledge. According to Hobbes, knowledge begins from the sense and imagination. Based on these imagination and presuppositions, we need particular analytic or synthetic method to analyse the information. Rousseau has linked knowledge with the form of nature. According to him, what man has got by birth is knowledge. According to John Dewey man is adaptive by nature. The sort of information man adapts in his behaviour is known as knowledge. According to Plato, knowledge forms from a fact or a 'p priori'. The previous incident of the fact is known as 'truth'. The first impression of the information is true and construct the knowledge.

Truth: Truth is a set of propositions that are based on reality or fact. A set of beliefs that has originated from fact is accepted as truth. Objective truth is independent of presupposition or discursive analysis. Subjective truth is relative to the observer's perception. In postmodernism truth is a consequence of belief and we cannot access reality because we can't break our own belief system. An executive fact that has taken its shape from the historical discourse is the basis of truth.

Power relations: Power relations are dynamics of authority and influence and shape the relations between individuals, societies and groups. The control over decisions and resources by a certain number of individuals to exercise their authority on the others is called power relation. This relationship determines the hierarchical status of the society. Gender, race, class and social status often influence the power relations and maintain the hierarchical order in the society. According to Foucault power relations are a 'set of actions upon other actions.' According to Foucault, power is not only repressive, but it also has productive values.

Episteme: Episteme is a fundamental set of ideas and presuppositions, defining accepted true knowledge. In ancient Greek episteme means knowledge or understanding. The set of facts that construct the history and assumptions taken from the past forms construct knowledge contributing to Episteme. According to Foucault, the philosophical ideas of the episteme of each is not linear progression but a non-linear pursuit of knowledge.

Discourse: Foucault's idea of discourse is the idea of communication written or spoken to construct knowledge and truth. In Literature discourse is the use of language to share ideas, information. The relation between truth, knowledge and language is the formation of discourse. Literature forms and constructs the truth to transform the knowledge accordingly. Discourse in literature has a long-term influence in the mind of the readers and the society. From the historical analysis of the facts knowledge and information are constructed as a mesh like net which channelize the authoritative relations with the readers and the society.

Discussion: Michel Foucault's idea of knowledge is somehow fluid. It is not a constant thing. Foucault has divided three ages to give a profound information on knowledge. The knowledge system of the West has a systematic coordination. Certain forms of human knowledge, especially in economics, philosophy and psychology are structured and institutionalised in certain ways. The underlying structure of knowledge at different historical

time is termed as episteme by Michel Foucault. 'Episteme' is basically the deep structures or meaning, and often unconscious pursuit that govern a historical period. It is not a specific body of knowledge or particular field, but a constructional framework that serves the purpose of power or institutionalised it in a subtle way. The idea that how knowledge is created and governed according to the perspectives of the West, needed critical inquiry. To understand human beings, society and nature the true history of the past ages must be considered. The perception of the world history, the perspective of the West needs critical inquiry. Certain disciplines and models of thinking emerged as dominant. The understanding of the human being and society is delved underneath into the construction of knowledge. In earlier periods humans were understood through divine or natural orders. But by the nineteenth century, humans were being understood as subjects to be studied, dissected and analysed. This shift deliberately gave birth to these subjects like philosophy, psychology and political economy. The Human Sciences categorised human behaviour and regulate the knowledge by institutionalising it.

There is a distance between truth and knowledge. In the first hand, information, what we get from the facts is called truth. Now the truth is changed and modified according to the situations and according to the ages. The basic information of a fact is the truth. But the truth can be modified and shaped accordingly. There is a presupposition of any fact. There is a prior knowledge of any accepted truth. And there is also a post knowledge independent of the fact. Knowledge is historically contingent rather than absolute. So basically, there is no absolute knowledge. It is always relative. The transformation of knowledge, according to the authoritarian proponents is devoid of Truth. Which can be termed as pseudo knowledge? Knowledge can be manipulated to control the social hierarchies. The accepted truth might not be the true knowledge of the fact. In the Middle Ages the churches influenced the people by their authoritative power using the name of God. Theological knowledge dictated social norms. Knowledge is produced and disseminated within the society. Knowledge dictates whose voices should be heard and whose voices could be marginalised. Knowledge dictates the relationship of the ruled and the ruler. So basically, the transformation of knowledge by the authority to control the social, economic and political institutions is the exponent of power dynamics. To exert power, we need to shape the knowledge. To maintain the social hierarchy of race, class, gender and socioeconomic status we need to redefine the power relations. To control resources and political decisions, individuals need to control the

knowledge system. So, power and knowledge are interlinked and reinforce each other. Without transforming the knowledge, one cannot legitimize the power system. Without the exertion of power, one cannot channelize the knowledge system through the human sciences, such as philosophy, psychology and economics. One cannot have mental control without the political and economic control. Knowledge is not neutral or independent. It legitimizes authority and marginalize certain groups. Knowledge is transformed through power relations and also can produce new forms of power. To understand any form of knowledge, we need to recognise the power structure that organise it. For example, the construction of the Orientalism by the European scholars is the exertion of authority. Before the writing of the book *Orientalism* by Edward said it was a matter of pride to the Asians that European scholars has written their history. But, the portrayal of the Asians in the Western academia, is much derogatory which is the product of the transformation of knowledge. To legitimize the Western discourse of superiority, the Western philosophers has portrayed the Asians in a very derogatory way that was exposed to the world. The portrayal of the female characters by the male authors in the narratives is not the true essence of a female character. The gender dichotomy has been established in the narratives by the male authors in portraying the female characters. In the Old English narratives and the ages followed, the female characters were shown as witches and demons. To legitimize the male authorship over the text, the depiction of the women through ages has been denominated. To exert power over gender the authors used the tool of literature to legitimize the hierarchy.

According to Michel Foucault, power is pervasive and productive. Unlike other theorists Foucault dismisses the idea of the repressive nature of power. According to him, power can shape the discipline in the society. Power exists in all forms in the society. In the institutions, social groups and community, power can be used to organise and maintain discipline according to Foucault. Power has also its progressive and productive pursuit. To understand any form of knowledge, it requires to recognise the power structures that supports it. Power can be used to dominate people and also can be used to resist the authority. Literature serves the purpose to circulate knowledge about the facts. Literature is the written form of discourse. Literature portraits and illustrates the facts. Literature derives the facts from history or from the present condition of the society. It is the responsibility of the literature to represent the true facts avoiding the pseudo-knowledge of the events. The transformation of knowledge which is devoid of truth, is pseudo-knowledge. Literature derives the fact from ancient

findings and objects. Literature is the mirror of the society. Representation of the facts in literature is the major responsibility of the authors. So, it is the responsibility of the authors to derive the facts from the real incidents and record the lived experiences of the individuals. Literature should be independent of personal responses. In *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said argued that, 'A European or Americans studying the Orient, comes up against the Orient as a European or American first. as an individual second (11).' So, literature should be independent of personal affirmations or confusions. It has been often seen that the marginalized voices are being suppressed and the authoritative voices has been included. While Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak has asked the question, Can the Subalterns Speak (1978)? It really affirms that the Subalterns cannot speak. So, it is the duty of the authors to speak on their behalf. According to Amitav Ghosh, "These people are too poor to matter". So, the truth of the marginalized community must be recorded in their own voices. The lived to experience of the Subalterns must be recorded in literature and not being suppressed. History tells us that there is enormous book that were censored. A number of authors were executed to publish the books that spoke about the corruption of the power. *Utopia* by Thomas Moore in 1516 was banned. *The Prince* by Niccolo Machiaveli was banned in 1555 for its criticism of the throne. *The Divine Comedy* (1564) by Dante Alighieri was banned. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1734) was banned in by John Locke. 1984 by George Orwell was banned for its socio-political themes, *The Colour Purple* by Alice Walker was banned for its racial, sexual and language content, and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*(1969) by Maya Angelou was banned because of racism, child abuse and sexuality.

Amitav Ghosh in *The Hungry Tide*(2004) has cited the instance of Morichjhapi Masacre. The refugees from Bangladesh had migrated into the Morichjhapi island. The settlers from the Bangladesh were Hindu Dalits. There was a conflict between the government and few locals of the Sunderbans. The government decided to transport the settlers into a settlement camp at Dandakaranya in Madhyapradesh. The government banned any movement in and out of Morichjhapi under Forest Preservation Act. The government implied Section 144 in the whole area that means out of civil disturbances it will be a criminal offence to gather four to five people in one place. People were forcibly prevented from bringing rice or water to Morichjhapi. Police boats has encircled the island. People separated from their family, hoarded the boat with sacks of grain, jerrycans and cans of drinking water. "These settlers were evidently hoping to sleep through the police cordon with some provisions to bring relief

to their fellow islanders.” (P-253). A police boat came down through Bagna River. The policemen ordered on their loudspeaker to turn back for the settlers to return to the shore they had come from. Suddenly there was gunfire. The settlers answered back, ‘*Morichjhapi Charbona.*’ Kusum was the victim of the Masacre. Though not a refugee she declared herself amongst the refugees by pronouncing the words like ‘us.’ Ghosh questions through Kusum that who are these people who love the animals most than the humans.

In the word of Kanai, “...these people are too poor to matter (306).”

In the *Animal's People* (2007), Indra Sinha has shown the destructive force of capitalism. He has shown how the victim of Khaufpur was the prey of the ‘Amrikan Kampani’ and how government has supported them by not compensating the victims properly. Sinha has shown that how the legal power deprived the victims by not giving proper punishment to the convict. Zafar goes against the company. He raises a movement to support the victims of Khaufpur. He had left his studies to support the poor folk of Khaufpur. He inspires animal to protest against the injustice of the Kampani. Zafar leads a nonviolent movement to pay off the injustice. Once he had heard the news of the disaster, he lived in studies. The threats from the Kampani could not stop him. Zafar initiated many activities like collecting of funds, providing medical aid as well as giving loans at low interest. He has come across all the way to serve humanity. The massive disaster that hit the poor hardest is the subject matter of his non-violent act. He financially helps Pyare Bai and her family. He has published his book of pictures that contains the evidences of that night. It illustrates that there was a fault in the Kampani that leaked the gas and victimised the entire population of that area. His book is easily comprehensible to the children. Zafar along with Animal and Nisha soled their feet to drag the court case on. The American defendant had not showed their face in the court nor their lawyer. For the past eighteen years the court seems empty and the lawyers and the Judge come late.

Zafar accuses the Amrikan Kampani before the Judge. The Judge orders to list up the company's assets in India and adjourns the court. Zafar is confident in his deed and firmly believes that the company should return to Khaufpur and remove the poison from the factory. It should remove the poison from the water and the air. Sinha here wanted to represent that the Kampani is the representative of the capitalist society of the first world nations. These 1%

of the capitalist chemical monopoly that play with the human lives are represented by the 'Amrikan Kampani'.

In *The Last Wave* (2014) Pankaj Sekhsaria has given an account of the history of the islands of Andaman. He has cited the example of the Battle of Aberdeen, which has a misinformation in the history. He has shown how the innocent indigenous people have been cheated on by the deceiver. He has shown how the British policies has affected the knowledge of the indigenous people and established their authority. According to Sekhsaria the Andaman Local Born are indeed a unique people with an unlikely identity born from a combination of the strange circumstances of their origin and the compulsions of their evolution. The genealogy of Seema is a good example for the evolutions and settlement of the Local Born. Seema's great grand- parents are Syed Iqbal and Lalita, who are the prisoners of the infamous Cellular Jail of Andamans. Syed chopped off a policeman's head who has raped his sister. This revenge killing was complicated by the fact that this victim was a policeman, a government servant. Sekhsaria has sharply pointed the social segregation of an innocent and a government servant. While, in general policemen encounter a rape accused, this act is rewarded to restore the social equilibrium.

History tells different versions of the line of the battle of Aberdeen. Few consider it an insignificant attack, a foolish attempt of the part of the locals. Others claim it as the great 'Battle of Aberdeen'. The glorious battle of the Andamanese is inscribed in stone in memory of those Andamanese aborigines who bravely fought the Battle of Aberdeen in May 1859 against the British policy. If the aborigine were not cheated on by Dudhnath Tiwari, the British were would have been completely routed from here. Here, in *The Last Wave* Sekhsaria has clarified a great deal of misconception about the Jarawas. When a dead body was found on the other side of the creek the crowd of masses cried out that the Jarawas had killed another man from the Andaman Public Works Department (APWD). The crowd provoked to great extent and opines that the Jarawas were ungrateful, the same dastardly junglees they had always been. Someone has clarified that the dead body was not of a APWD worker and the Jarawas had not killed him. His body was found a few kilometres from the jetty. So, it is social structure that was evidently exposed that the killings were not the act of the Jarawas but they are accused of on behalf of a trend. The PWD truck that had killed Rajib Samaddar was parked nearby.

Findings:

Michel Foucault's concept of power- knowledge relation is clearly seen in the select texts. In *The Hungry Tide*, the government had misled the local people of the Sunderbans islands that the refugees were not their own people. So, they should not give space to the refugees to settle in the islands. This misinformation transformed the knowledge of the locals about the refugees who were driven out by the Bangladesh government. The refugees were transported into the forests of Dandakaranya. The conflict between the government and the locals roused and a gunfire was shot. Several people along with the women and children were killed without any offence of their own. The government of both the country have deprived the poor people of their land rights. Both the government have deprived their share of the 'commons'. The basic rights of their sustenance was denied by the power systems and they had to pay their last breathe to maintain social order of authority. The misinformation about their own people divided them into two parts in the name of nationality.

In *The Last Wave*, Pankaj Sekhsaria has given a brief account of the history of the islands. It was Dudhnath Tiwari who was helped by the Great Andamanese, and in the contrary betrayed them. But the recorded history gives several versions of the fact. So, the real knowledge of the fact was remained vague in the backdrop of the history of the Andaman Islands. Again, Sekhsaria has shown that how Seema's grandparent was convicted because he murdered a police official. Sekhsaria shown how power relations take different shapes in controlling the same kind of conviction for two people from different hierarchical order of the society. The Jarawa territory is named after as 'The Jarawa Reserve' which is equivalent to an animal reserve area. The considerations of the Jarawas along with the animals shows the anthropocentric domination not on 'others' but on the backward human community itself.

In the *Animal's People*, Sinha has shown how capitalisation has taken the lives of several innocent people and harmed the lives of several generations by polluting the environment of Khaufpur. The corruption of the local government and the partiality of the government has been depicted beautifully. The government neither gave any medical aid nor give the proper compensation. The government used the power to safeguard the company and deprived the victims of their right to get compensation. The agrochemical company which was responsible for the industrial accident easily got rid of the conviction and never appear before the court. The authority of the court was so controlling that it delayed the justice for a non-ending

period and hence legitimize the corrupted penal system. Zafar united the people and raised his voice for justice. So, Foucault's idea of the productivity of power is broadly justifies that knowledge can also be used to resist power.

The power relation prevails in all stages of society. In the one hand knowledge can be transformed to legitimize power relations, on the other hand knowledge can also be used to resist power. Power has not only the repressive attribute but it has also the productivity to shape and maintain order in the society. Knowledge can be used to resist power. The select narratives shows how knowledge is being transformed to legitimize power and shape the course of history and how knowledge can also be used to resist power. It has been derived that absolute power create relative knowledge.

“Until the lion learns how to write, every story will glorify the hunter.”

- *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1977)

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