

Foucauldian Theory of Power Relations in the African Milieu

*Sandhya George

PhD Scholar, Department of English, St Thomas College (Autonomous), Thrissur

ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
Article History Published Online: 10 February 2021	<i>Foucault is a thinker, postmodernist and post structuralist. Foucault has been highly influential in shaping understandings of power, and he uses power as an instrument of coercion. The notion of power is central to his thinking. He looked at it through critical, historical perspectives. Foucault examines how various institutions exert their power on groups and individuals. Foucault's concept has been widely used to critique development thinking. Power, as such encompasses many things including potential, dominance, ability, agency. Foucault breaks the concept of power and discusses various modes of power.</i>
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*Corresponding Author Email: gsandhya095[at]gmail.com	

Foucault defines that Power is something exercised, put into action, in relationships - an active relation, rather than a possession. Foucault says that power produces it, it produces reality. It produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. The way power is exercised is through monitoring, surveillance and it controls and governs the society. He did have the perspective of that of a post structuralist that helped him to see the world and language in manifold pathways conditioned by social structure, culture and discourses. Foucault states that knowledge, power and truth are linked. The strategic adversary is fascism... Fascism is us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us. There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations". He brings the idea that power is everywhere embodied in discourse, knowledge. Power for Foucault is what makes us what we are.

Africa was under the control of European powers from 1884 to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Historians highlight this period as New Imperialism or Scramble for Africa. This was followed by the process of decolonisation in Africa that began after the Second World War and lasted till the 1970s. The continent is at the centre of great power politics. Africa does not have a serious, unified strategy or the institutional capacity to effectively respond to this so-called "new scramble for Africa.

Gaventa says that Foucault's work marks a radical departure from previous modes of conceiving power and cannot be easily integrated with previous ideas, as power is diffuse, rather than concentrated, embodied and enacted rather than possessed, discursive rather than purely coercive and constitutes agents rather than being deployed by them. It's a kind of metapower /regime of hierarchy that pervades society. Foucault uses the term power to signify that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge and scientific understanding. For konkan, ways that power is a negative or repressive idea that forces us to do against our wishes. In fact

Foucault hated the bourgeois class and culture and was sympathetic to those groups who were at the margins including homosexuals, artists, prisoners etc. In Discipline and Punish: Birth of a prison, Foucault talks about the emergence of prison system. Prison is an institution where they are chained and ruled by the system. Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, a design for prison has exercised a great influence in the 19th century strict architecture. The idea of discipline of idea of discipline was propagated, which has the power to produce docile bodies that is human dummies that completely wipes out the thought process of an individual, thereby leads to the psychological control of the individual, which implies the nothingness of human existence or the absurd phase that Beckett speaks about. The idea that you are under surveillance brings the thought of insecurity, scepticism, controlling our thought process, physicality, as it propagates the capillary notion of power. Here we talk about the power that prohibits, that chains us. The interconnections with truth are also related to power. Foucault states "Truth is a thing of this world. It is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth, ie the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned, the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

He was interested in the history of government, the effects of democratic revolutions and was interested in analysing how power operates within a democratic system in which people are supposed to govern themselves. He explains about the modes of power which the democracy experiences including Bio power, sovereign power, disciplinary power, pastoral power. Biopower is the power exercised over bodies. Foucault connects biopower with history, racial ideologies, sexuality. There existed a time when there were no officers, ministers, legal affairs, where government didn't record birth or death rates. He believed in possibilities for action and resistance. He questioned the socialised norms and

constraints. He says about discourses as a site of both power and resistance; with the scope to subvert the strategies of power.

"Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it...we must take make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power, it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart. Biopolitical power is literally the power of our bodies. Virno says that Biopolitical can be transformed into a word that hides, covers problems instead of being an instrument for confronting them. Sovereign power is the mode of power exercised in a monarchy (queen or king power of nobility), where authorities try to control the masses, portrays dominant power form. Disciplinary power is where we exercise ourselves based on our knowledge of how we fit into the society. This form of power is exercised through surveillance, gaze, supervision, subjective authority. Foucault says that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. Pastoral power is where priests are called pastos, in Protestant churches. The metaphor pastoral highlights this mode of power.

Discipline and punish says that the new forms of power and punishments emerges from the capitalist society. "Punishment is not primary repayment for an incurred injury, but more a supervised penance emanating from the individuals, his biography and casual connections derived there from. Thus, the execution of the sentence is separated from the offence against the law per se.."(Foucault). Criminals were treated with arbitrariness and brutality by the state authorities. Bentham's idea of panopticon can be a universal model for all institutions involved in such activities including hospital, educational institutions, asylums, workhouses, factories etc. Imprisonment is more over a legal deprivation of freedom, the individual no longer experiences freedom, the pain, atrocities. Trauma and trepidations, tortures all are encircled within the four pillars around them. Deprivation of freedom implies the death of the individual even when he is alive. In prison, the individual is taken away from social display and is controlled by power. Looking at the trajectories of history, 17th century was an era of absolute monarch, quite repressive and brutal including public torture, directed to physicality, external body. Coming to 18th century, rise and power of capitalist economies and industrialism came about, where the forms of power shifted

from monarch to disciplinary institutions including prison and coming to 20th century it changes to continuous monitoring, the idea that you are being watched upon.

Notion of power induces a permanent disability there it becomes the trap where we lose freedom and individuality in existence. Foucault is an eclectic thinker food rose from multiple sources about power and the function it performs. Foucault's critique of modernity and humanism, along with declaration of death of man and development of new perspectives of society, knowledge, structure and power made him a major source of postmodernist thought. In a preface to democratic theory, Robert Dahl defines power as a type of relationship in respect of capability and control, whereas Karl Deutsch says that power means the ability to be involved in conflict, to resolve it and to remove the obstacles.

Power implies the ability to influence or control others or to get things done, which is disaggregated or non-cumulative. Power is not concentrated at any particular center. All centers of power do claim to have equal or almost equal amounts of power. In other words, there is an unequal distribution of power like an unequal distribution of wealth. Foucault was indeed deeply affected by his understandings during the Tunisian protests of 1966-68, during which he helped radical students financially, he hid a printing machine used for anti-government pamphlets in his garden, and he was increasingly subjected to police surveillance and harassment. This period gives the periodic portrayal of Foucault as a detached or politically passive intellectual. So too can the Foucault-inspired governmentality strategy refute accusations that Foucauldian theory is incapable of making sense of African politics, or global power relations. These events have focussed attention on constitutive questions: how are African civil societies produced and subjectivised? How are states problematised, made fragile, rebuilt and stabilised? Foucault rethinks the nature of modern power in a non-totalizing, nonrepresentational way. AU should develop a coherent, unified and comprehensive strategy to deal with the three superpowers' competition over its natural resources and engage all three superpowers to cooperate with Africa instead of exploiting it. It should swiftly implement robust institutional reforms and start acting as the decisive power on the continent. Foucault says where there is power there is resistance in history of sexuality. Foucault marks a rupture in history that inaugurates a radically different mode of power than theorized in the judicial model, a power that is productive, not repressive, in nature, one which is bent on generating forces, making them glow and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit or destroying them.

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