

Postmodern View of Power and its Comparison with Gandhi's View

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ABSTRACT

The concept of power has been a subject of interest for many political scientists. In this paper Gandhi's concept of power is being analysed by comparing it with postmodernists' view of power. According to Gandhiji, power is of two kinds one which is based on fear of being punished and other which is based on love. In Gandhi's philosophy power was given an entirely new dimension unknown in previous traditional schools of thought. Similarly, Foucault and other post modernists altogether gave different meaning to the concept of power when they defined power in terms of knowledge. In the power-knowledge dichotomy of Foucault, he concluded that power creates such mechanisms which generates different types of knowledge that gather information on each and every aspect of life of people. Gandhi's philosophy is idealistic where he considers power as means of politics to attain spiritual and moral ends. He invented the concept of Sarvodaya to serve this purpose. On the other hand, postmodernists are of the opinion that the modern state uses the construct of power to keep its citizens in check. They use power to produce some knowledge and subdue some other knowledge. In general, they say that power is everywhere, present in every social relation. By comparing the two different schools of thought this paper tries to conclude how Gandhian concept of power is different from that of post modernists although it is Gandhiji whose thoughts, a state should aim for.

Keywords: Discourse, Governmentality, Metanarratives, Normalizing Power, Orientalism, Post-Modern, Swaraj.

Introduction

"Knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same question."¹

"By power... I do not understand a general system of domination exercised by one element or one group over another, whose effects... traverse the entire body social... It seems to me that first what needs to be

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understood is the multiplicity of relations of force that are immanent to the domain wherein they are exercised, and that are constitutive of its organization; the game that through incessant struggle and confrontation transforms them, reinforces them, inverts them; the supports these relations of force find in each other, so as to form a chain or system, or, on the other hand, the gaps, the contradictions that isolate them from each other; in the end, the strategies in which they take effect, and whose general

pattern or institutional crystallization is embodied in the mechanisms of the state, in the formulation of the law, in social hegemonies. The condition of possibility of power... should not be sought in the primary existence of a central point, in a unique space of sovereignty whence would radiate derivative and descendent forms; it is the moving base of relations of force that incessantly induce, by their inequality, states of power, but always local and unstable. Omnipresence of power: not at all because it regroups everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced at every instant, at every point, or moreover in every relation between one point and another. Power is everywhere: not that it engulfs everything, but that it comes from everywhere."² (History of Sexuality, Volume 1)

"Power is of two kinds. One is obtained by fear of punishment and other by acts of love. Power based on love is a thousand times more effective and permanent than the one derived from fear of punishment."³

The concept of power acquires a central place in social and political studies. It is studied with great interest especially after interdisciplinary studies began including political science. The behavioral approach has given special focus to studying this concept. This paper attempts to draw a contrast between the philosophical thought of Gandhiji and the post-modern approach to power.

The Concept of Power

Robert Dahl in his book, "A Preface to Democratic Theory" defines power as a relationship in respect of capability and control. Max Weber defines power as, "the ability of an individual or group to achieve their own goals or aims when others are trying to prevent them from realizing them." Power thus seems to be a system of relation, which can be exercised by one person in order to influence another. It cannot be exercised alone. There are two things: he who exercises power, and another on whom power is exercised. If the thing over which it is exercised refuses to be moved by the possessor's power, it subsequently loses the state of power. Morgenthau is of the opinion, "Power may comprise anything that establishes and maintains control of man over man (and it) covers all social relationship which serve that end, from physical violence to the most subtle psychological ties by which one mind controls another."

On the other hand, Hannah Arendt gives constructive view of power. She says in her book *On Violence*, "Power corresponds to human ability not just to act but to act in concert." She distinguishes between power and violence and says that when people act in a concerted way its power and when ruling class acts coercively its violence.

Power implies things done by one's will by influencing the minds of others. Power can be exercised through force or authority (legally). Thus, power is used in a primarily relative sense, although it has many other contexts as well. In this paper, quite different perspectives on power are compared, which are themselves different from the traditional meaning of power.

Gandhi's Concept of Power

Gandhi, in *Young India*, wrote: "to me political power is not an end but one of the means of enabling people to better their conditions in every department of life. Political power means the capacity to regulate national life through national representatives. If national life becomes so perfect as to become self-regulated, no representation become necessary. There is then a state of enlightened anarchy. In such a state everyone is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour."⁴ Gandhiji believed in political -moral principles. He believed that power belongs to the

people. It should give people opportunities to make their lives better. In this scenario, there will be no need for a coercive government, which will only be a facilitator. People will control their own affairs, rendering government useless for moral anarchy. This is empowering of people or "power to people" which may be construed as constructive power. Again, Gandhiji in *Young India* wrote, "Power is of two kinds. One is obtained by the fear of punishment and the other by arts of love. Power based on love is a thousand times more effective and permanent than the one derived from fear of punishment."⁵

Here he is distinguishing between two kinds of power viz. power based on love and other based on punishment. He clearly stated that if authority and power is based on love and affection, it will last forever. In this case, the power is long-lasting and constructive, which will make an enabling environment for the people. On the other hand, if the authority is based on the fear of punishment, it will be short-lived. As soon as people find a way to overcome fear, power will find its end. This was done during the Gandhian movements as the fear of the laws and authority of British rule was rooted out of the minds of Indians. Here, a note of Non-Cooperation movement, Civil Disobedience movement and Quit India movement can be taken.

Gandhiji's concept of "Swaraj" is cornerstone of his political philosophy regarding power to people. Swaraj is made up of two words: "स्व + राज" which simply means self-rule. This means people will have authority over themselves with an element of love and there will be no room for fear. The state will be non-violent so will the citizens. "Ahimsa" will be the guiding principle of such a state. In such a state people will be aware of their duties implying that the state will use no power and as such no violence will occur.

Postmodern View on Power

Jean Francois Lyotard defined postmodernism as "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives."⁶

Postmodernism is a late 20th-century movement characterised by broad skepticism, subjectivism, or relativism; a general suspicion of reason; and an acute sensitivity to the role of ideology in asserting and maintaining political and economic power."⁷ Nietzsche is regarded as the father of post modernism. He is highly critical of western philosophers especially Plato. He famously said that God is dead. Regarding "power", he gave the concept of "Will To Power" which is the reason behind any action.⁸ According to him, Will to power is stronger than even will to life and theories are built to exercise power. He has also given the concept of superman, one who has superpower, more power than others.⁹ Superman has power to challenge the conventional morality and the ability to lead life according to his own choice.¹⁰ It implies that majority of us are prisoners of conventional morality."¹¹ It implies that Nietzsche for the first time gave unconventional view of power and was of the view that anyone who can question the existing philosophy has more power than others.

Reality is defined and shaped by the dominant forces within a culture that create their own metanarratives. Through metanarratives, the dominant power structures create dominate modes of "reality."¹² Therefore, he always opposed meta narratives as they are constructed by those in authority to

dominate others. "Knowledge in the form of an informational commodity indispensable to productive power is already, and will continue to be, a major perhaps the major stake in the worldwide competition for power." (Post Modern Condition)¹³ Lyotard was of the view that with development of modern technologies especially the computer and internet knowledge will become indispensable for the state to maintain power. Universities and higher education institutions are required to operate and dispense knowledge according to the requirements of the government. According to Derrida the whole concept of enforcement of law and enforceability 'reminds us that there is no such thing as law that does not imply in itself, a priori, in the analytical structure of its concept, the possibility of being "enforced," applied by force. There are, to be sure, laws that are not enforced, but there is no law without enforceability, and no applicability or enforceability of the law without force, whether this force be direct or indirect, physical or symbolic, exterior or interior, brutal or subtly discursive and hermeneutic, coercive or regulative, and so forth.¹⁴ According to Derrida, in every act of conservation (of legal system) there is refounding (of legal system) so that what is found can be conserved. Hence there is no difference between law making and law preserving violence or just and unjust use of violence.¹⁵ Derrida is of the view that the system (he specifically mentions Legal system) is established and maintained by use of violence or force which is legal for the state to use as law permits it to do so. So power is essential in the state to sustain itself and it is legitimized by the legal system so that there is no opposition.

Before moving further, one must take note of the concept of Orientalism given by Edward Said which help us to understand the knowledge power connect given by Michel Foucault. According to Edward Said, Orientalism is criticizing the native culture as barbaric and uncivilized and glorifying the western culture. Thus, during colonialism, literature was written in such a way that the slave countries started believing that their slavery is for their betterment and development. Knowledge was created to subdue the slave countries. But study of power by post modernists will be incomplete without considering the views of Foucault who dealt with the concept in depth. His views on power are the most outstanding of all the post modernists. Foucault defines post modernity in terms of discourse and discourse is interpreted through power. He started with the truism: **knowledge is power**. He was particularly interested in knowledge of human beings, and power that acts on human beings. Suppose we start with the statement: knowledge is power, but doubt we have any knowledge of absolute truth.¹⁶ Postmodernism primarily concerns itself about the relation between power and knowledge. Foucault defines post modernity in terms of power, knowledge and discourse as below:

"Close scrutiny of the micro-politics of power relations in different localities, contexts and social situations leads us to conclude that there is an intimate relation between the systems of knowledge/discourse which codify techniques and practices for the exercise of social control and domination within the particular localized contexts, "¹⁷

According to Michel Foucault, "Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. "¹⁸ Michel Foucault talks about normalizing power which differs from traditional repressive power. Normalizing power makes people do things according to their own will which they have to do anyway, being a part of society and they do as society wants them to do. The whole education system makes an individual fit for a society as an individual learns there what should be ideal and

righteous actions. Thus, he becomes what society demands from him. In other words, he becomes normal which is needed from him by society. Thus, normalizing power determines what one sees as normal in the sense it creates a viewpoint of the world around us. It shapes one's beliefs, desires, and decisions. But at the same time, it makes one believe that these beliefs are not forced upon him. His beliefs are not against his will. Whereas repressive power uses force to get things accomplished, normalizing power will get things done without force as people will do the required considering that it's their own will. Foucault further says that repressive power is visible and is seen in institutions like police, military, judges, politicians etc. only. But normalizing power is everywhere.

Family, school, colleges, universities, hospitals etc. are all embodiments of normalizing power. Michel Foucault said, "Schools serve the same social functions as prisons and mental institutions- to define, classify, control, and regulate people."¹⁹ According to him, if anyone really wants to know how power works, he must study the aforesaid institutions. Foucault believes that power is not exercised by the few over the many, but power is something which all are subject to. Power is found in every relationship and at every level. When it is part of society, everyone knows the way of behaviour that is taught as ideal and correct. All follows this behaviour taught to them as such they are subjected to normalizing power.

The cornerstone of Foucault's thought is knowledge is inseparable from power. The institutions of knowledge are actually sources of normalizing power. A school or a university makes people aware of right and wrong. They believe that they have been instructed there, and act in this way and willingly. It is the very institutions of knowledge that make them do this, because it is these institutions that determine what is normal for society and what is not. For example: a hospital decides whether a person is sick or healthy, i.e. whether a person is normal or not. Here Foucault's famous dichotomy of the powers of science becomes relevant. Knowledge plays an important role in the institutions that educate us, and these institutions constantly use normalizing power over people.

The application of this concept is further seen in Foucault's another term: "government". The government controls knowledge there by controls the institutions. Governmentality, an expression originally formulated by the 20th-century French philosopher Michel Foucault, combines the terms government and rationality. Government in this sense refers to conduct, or an activity meant to shape, guide, or affect the conduct of people. Conduct takes on meaning beyond the form of leading and directing. It also refers to the "conduct of oneself" where a sense of self-governance is a guiding force. Rationality, as a form of thinking that strives to be systematic and clear about how things are or ought to be, suggests that before people or things can be controlled or managed, they must first be defined. Therefore, the state designs systems for defining populations, which make them known and visible. They include mechanisms of management and administration (work processes, procedures, rules) and ways of classifying individuals or groups (by income, race, professional and personnel categories), which allow for their identification, classification, ordering, and control.²⁰

Thus, normalizing power is nothing but a means in the hands of the government. The governments thereby construct their aims and ambitions as knowledge which people willingly accept as they are subjected to normalizing power. Thus, there is no coercion and no use of force and violence, and the governments simply carry out their plans without any opposition from the public.

Conclusion

Gandhiji and post modernists, both gave their own interpretation of power which were very different from conventional view of power. Although there are some differences between their perspectives regarding power.

Gandhiji view power as an enabler providing opportunities to people for their betterment. Foucault views power as a means to create people loyal to society or government irrespective of their betterment. Derrida finds it legitimate to use power on people. Lyotard like Foucault is of the view that meta narratives are created to assert power over people by the governments.

Gandhiji talks about moral anarchy whereas post modernists talk about organized state with machinery to control knowledge. Gandhiji favours power of love and disregard power involving fear and punishment while post modernists like Foucault views that those in power use knowledge to make people do things willingly. As such a man in Foucault's state is not free as his mind is trained by institutions of state although there is no violence. But in case of Gandhiji's state man is free.

Gandhiji gave the concept of "Swaraj" or self-rule where people will be aware of their duties and state will not use power as fear, but it will use power based on love as people will be self-regulated and there will be no use of fear and punishment. Lyotard condemned the meta narratives created by the governments to make people believe in the truth that favours the government. He predicted that the governments would continue to control sources of knowledge to maintain power. Foucault gave the concept of "Government" where it controls knowledge through its institutions which in turn creates citizens which are subjected to power but willingly. Here there is no room for self-rule as citizens are under normalizing power. However, both noted that there is no use of violence either in "Swaraj" or "Government". In the State of Derrida, violence is legitimized to maintain the system. In case of "Swaraj" there is "power to people" while in Foucault's "Government" there is "power over people" although in subtle and invisible form. Similarly other post modernists too cite "power over others" as people are slave to the knowledge and legal systems of the state.

Gandhiji 's concept of power has moral and spiritual overtones. Foucault views power from postmodern and post-structuralist point of view. Foucault and other post modernists believe that there is no universal truth.²¹ Truth changes with time. Those in power have control over knowledge which in turn changes truth favouring those in power. This power-knowledge dichotomy of Foucault and Lyotard highlights how power-elites control and sustain their regimes and state.

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