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## “POWER IS DIFFUSE”: AUTHENTICATING FOUCAULT’S CONCEPT OF POWER ON THE RECENT GLOBAL GEO-POLITICAL TURMOILS

**Dr. Vanlaltanpuia**

Associate Professor, Pachhunga University College, Aizawl, Mizoram

### Abstract

Unlike a typical way of understanding ‘POWER’ as something possessed, an instrument of coercion, a legitimate means to control and give order, Michel Foucault, a French post-structuralist and postmodern thinker understands that ‘power is everywhere’, diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and ‘regime of truth’. Power, according to him is embedded in the natural form of society, operating in a varied form at different level of communities. It is diffuse rather than concentrated, embodied and enacted rather than possessed, discursive rather than purely coercive, a net-like network is chained up and dispersed everywhere.

Foucault challenges the idea that power is a top to bottom single dimensional form of occurrence of those who possessed it, have a legitimate dominion over people or groups of people either in the form of limited or wider concept, seeing it instead as dispersed and pervasive. ‘Power is everywhere’ and ‘comes from everywhere’ so in this sense is neither an agency nor a structure. It is a kind of ‘metapower’ or an ‘inherent force’ that pervades society, and which is in constant flux and negotiation.

Looking at the current geo-political scenario where a concrete and unchallenged sovereign power is overthrown overnight by a locally organized groups or organizations abruptly. Something a country takes it as eternal solace, a symbol of pride, a principle of truth and sustenance are replaced drastically with proxy leaders with their self-made rules, impossible in the strictest sense, but true in present context. Being in the midst of this volatile situation, the concept of Power needs to be readdressed with Foucauldian context as an academic discourse.

**Key Word:** Power, Diffuse, Coercion, Geo-politics

### 1. Introduction: The Concept of Power from General Parlance

Definitionally, nothing like the term ‘Power’ has a wider implication and concern in formal as well as in colloquial usages. Its concept of heterogeneity touches upon diverse areas, down from the individual to sovereign power, and even implied with a power generated from electricity possibly extended to strongest power like nuclear in another domain. Of numerous possible interpretations and meanings, the paper focusses on the subjectivity of how ‘power’ became an essential driving force of social institutions, the impetus of dynamic structure of society as asserted by Foucault on the one hand, and how this productive nature of power drastically can convert into something potent, unpredictably violent, chaotic, and vibrant following the narratives of people on the other hand respectively. (M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*)

Merriam-Websters Dictionary defines Power as ‘ability to act or produce an effect’, ‘capacity to be acted upon or to undergo an effect’, legal or official authority, capacity, or right, physical might, ability to get extra-base hits, mental or moral efficacy, control, authority, or influence over others, political control or influence, one having control, authority, or influence, a country that has a lot of influence and military force, a controlling group, etc. verb – to supply with power and especially motive power, to give impetus to, adjective – operated mechanically or electrically rather than manually, of, relating to, or utilizing strength plays a power game, etc.

Conventionally, Power is conceptualized as the capacity of using one’s status in the form of giving an order, control, and domination over others. It is mostly understood as something possession – something that is held onto by those in privileged position, have their will exercised over the powerless or subordinates. It sounds dominating and oppressive as it primarily reflects on the superiority of one side of two groups – the privileged and unprivileged in this context. In the chronology of



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thinking ‘Enlightenment’s emancipatory knowledge turns out to involve itself with a question of power, which complicates and perhaps even restricts its emancipatory quality. Knowledge conceived as abstract and utilitarian, as a mastery over recalcitrant nature, becomes characterized by power; as a result, ‘Enlightenment behaves toward things as a dictator toward man. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them. It manifests in a way to have mastery over nature. (Docherty)

## 2. Glimpse of Foucauldian Concept of Power: An Encompassing Concept

Foucault (1924– 1984), in his works such as *The History of Sexuality* (1978), *Power / Knowledge* (1980), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973), and *Discipline and Punish* (1977), he discusses about Power unconventionally, addressing it as a subjective underlying force behind the social institution. Its nature of being subjectively lying dormant and pervasive gets erupted and manifested depending upon the contexts of social institutions. However, he is of the view that a structure like something essentially inherent, objectively present behind the phenomena is what is negated, but made to activate rather at different level of social practices and relations. His work is a critical of the notion that power is something which a group of people or an institution possess and that power is only concerned with oppressing and constraining. His concept primarily tries to deconstruct the idea of power as a phenomenon between the oppressor and the oppressed, a compulsive interaction between the ruler and the ruled, but establish the idea on contrary, that power operates within everyday foundational relations between people and the institutions they’re attached with. (M. Foucault, Structuralism and post-structuralism: An Interview). He unveils the truth of its essential underlying nature that without the notice of, or within the paradigm of what we take it for granted, it pervades as an impetus of power concepts. Being a post-structuralist, a post-modern thinker having affinities with 20<sup>th</sup> Century philosophy, his concern basically is to get layered the social phenomenon particularly of power manifestation necessarily happens within the influence of society’s regime of truth and discourses. It further entails the lived-situation where man and society essentially are pre-conditioned by the subjectivity of power in the practical engagement of the world. (Turner)

In the *History of Sexuality Vol -1* (1979), he made a critique that power is something which is performed, and cultivated instead that it is more like a strategy than a possession. Power should be seen as a verb rather than a noun, something that does something, rather than something which is or which can be held onto. (Mills, Michel Foucault) He elaborated in *Power / Knowledge* that ‘Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain ... Power is empowered and exercised through a net-like organizations ... individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application’ (Foucault).

## 3. Encountering Repressive form of Power with Normalizing Power

Michel Foucault as one of the postmodern thinkers has identified the major target in his approach: “All my analyses are against the idea of universal necessities in human existence”, so is power essentially has a one-dimensional way of coercive nature. (E. P. Foucault) It is interesting and thought provoking to understand Foucault’s concept of power, and a link he found between power and science. Foucault leads us to a newer way of looking at power, the way which allows us to find power in places where we would never see it before including in university and in scientific knowledge itself. To understand Foucault’s thinking, we would make a distinction between two kinds of power - Repressive and normalizing power. To think of power in terms of repression is a conventional way of thinking, but against that the most power and that is actually the most important power in our bond of society doesn’t look repressive at all. It works in a far subtler less visible way. This power is what Foucault called Normalizing power.

Repressive power when we think of someone who is exercising power, some of the images that comes in our mind is a Judge ordering a criminal to be locked up for several years, a country with its military power to conquer another country, and an angry boss telling his employee that they got fired for being incompetent enough in their respective works, so on and so forth. When we think of power under this manner, we tend to think of violence whether physical or mental, whether actual or only threatening. This is the idea of power as repression. You want to do something but someone else uses their power to force you to do their bidding instead. Such power is found quite effective and undeniably true in general cases,



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but it is a failure to many cases too. Analogy given above as a judge made a court verdict to punish the criminal, a sovereign power using its military power over other country, and the employees got fired by a boss on being incompetent enough, etc. can anytime happen in a reversal way, a failure in operation. For what operates in these circumstances are legitimized within a limited domain of only the affected ones pulled together through attractive baits and compulsion devoid of willingness and essential submission to it, repressive anyhow. Repressive power is more visible but secondary on Foucauldian context because what characterizes the situation is coercion, force, violence, oppression, artificial, legitimized with certain conditions administered, less occasionally happened though in our lives. Because with the fear of being caught by stealing that sends us to jail, we can always prevent ourselves of not stealing, distanced ourselves from what punishes us, hence less effect on us. And this is the case that Foucault enters with a new concept of normalizing power. For repressive power forces us to do what we do not want to do. Normalizing power makes us to do what we wanted to do instead. It turns us into people who automatically by their own do a society wishes us to do. Power, in fact, is not wielded by a few individuals over the many, but something to which everyone is subjected.

Science cannot be separated from power. Scientific knowledge is an extremely important standard for normalizing of power (Norris)

#### 4. Authenticating Foucault’s Concept from Recent Geo-Political Scenario:

##### A. Bangladesh Political Turmoil

On August 5, 2024 a massive escalation of protest was held in Bangladesh in which the then ruling Prime Minister Sheikh Hassina was ousted from the country and ended a one and half decade of her rule since 2009. Surprisingly, the event was initiated not by a political agitator, but by innocent students of Dhaka University and Chittagong University, later ignited into mass population. What led to this political turmoil resulted in the dead of thousands of people overnight? It was mainly because of a student’s protest against **the Quotas** in the government jobs. It was against the legislation of the ruling Awami League Party led Bangladesh Parliament which reserved thirty percent (30%) of government jobs recruitment for families of 1971 Bangladesh freedom fighters, a protest escalated in large scale country-wide agitation which ousted Sheikh Hassina, finally led her exiled to India for political asylum. An interim government substituted by Nobel laureate Dr. Mohammad Yunus took over following the deaths of over 1400 people, aiming to reform the decadence of the authoritarian government and economic crisis thereof. It was the results of sudden outburst of chaotic anger, devoid of pre-plan and strategic retaliation; it violently erupts.

##### B. 2025 Nepalese Gen Z Protests

Ever since the restoration of democracy in 1990, Nepal has undergone the reign of twenty-seven prime ministers, each of them averaging barely for a year in a rule. To our astonishment, in just a span of 35 years twenty-seven prime ministers have already been appointed officially, of which none of them was a woman though. The appointment of Sushila Karki, the former chief justice became the game changing scenario following recent political turmoil of Nepal in 2025.

In September 2025 there happened a violent outburst of people’s anger against the incumbent Nepal government that soon turned into a nationwide mass protest. The move against a backdrop of economic dysfunction and widespread youth disillusionment, ignited mass protest in Kathmandu and other cities, a protest led by none other than Nepalese youth who labelled themselves as ‘Generation Z’ (Gen Z) demonstrators. The incident broke out with the ban of social media like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, LinkedIn, Reddit, Snapchat, Discord, Threads, and WeChat, with an intention of curtailing outright criticism of the incumbent government. Besides these, a widespread corruption amongst the politicians, bureaucrats, and tired of unending streak of old-fashioned leaders rule triggered a large-scale protest. Clashes between the protesters and the Military forces was terribly violent, set the Parliament building and high government buildings ablaze and turned into ashes. Smokes of burning buildings, vehicles, and debris of item rampaged by protestors everywhere in the street. On September 22, 2025 casualties of around 2113 people and the dead of as many as 74 already was witnessed, urged KP. Sharma Oli, the then Prime Minister of Nepal tender a resignation and overthrown the government abruptly. The interim government led by Prime Minister Sushila Karki later oversaw parliamentary election on 5<sup>th</sup> of March, 2026. In this election, Kathmandu Mayor Balendra Shah (popularly known as ‘Balen’), a novice politician, structural engineer, and a popular rapper made a landslide victory of securing majority of votes by his party – Rashtriya



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Swatantra Party. He's becoming the new Prime Minister of Nepal by forming a government without the need for coalition for the first time since 1999, an incident devoid of pre-plan indeed, but led by urge and situational.

### **C. Gen Z Revolution: "Aragalaya" in Sri Lanka**

What echoes comes around in Sri Lanka too in 2022 as the Gen Z Revolutionists retaliate the incumbent Rajapaksa government which reign for about 20 years, over corruption, serious economic crisis and growing authoritarianism. This protest led to the toppling of the ruling Rajapaksa dynasty which eventually fled the country like his brother, the finance minister did. While the country was then ruled for two years by Ranil Wickremesinghe, who delayed new election, the protest movement did eventually lead to seismic change at the ballot box. In the 2024 presidential election, voters elected Anura Kumara Disanayake of National People's Power party. This is a resonance of power heterogeneity, made to manifest as compelled by the situation anytime, anywhere outside of the regime of traditional structure.

### **D. The Cockroach Janata Party: India's Satirical Youth Movements**

In May, 2026 India witnessed the unprecedented Satirical Youth movements popularly known as "The Cockroach Janata Party" (CJP), a surge in interest attracting millions of followers in India and worldwide overnight (Jha). The Cockroach movement was thrust into the spotlight overnight in retaliation to the controversial comments made by the incumbent Chief Justice of India – Mr. Surya Kant during a court hearing on 15 May 2026. He allegedly mimicked that the unemployed youths are drifting towards journalism by unceasingly and overly engaging themselves in social media, and with all their alleged toxic behaviors eventually, are compared them with cockroaches and parasites of society. It was founded on the following day of 16 May, 2026 by Abhijeet Dipke, a political communications strategist whose immense contribution has led to the successful emergence of the Aam Aadmi Party in Indian Political scene. Beyond expectations, within days of its founding, the movement magnate over 300,000 to 400,000 sign-ups and over 20 million followers on their Instagram page. The name being a parody of the ruling party in India, a movement originated with an insult, satirical, and unorganized mockery, became a tremendous power and mighty roars of the allegedly lazy and unemployed youths of the current Indian political situation. These overall reflects the idea that power is not fixed within formal structure, but dynamic as Foucault long before proclaimed it.

### **5. Conclusion: A Hermeneutical Comment**

To conclude, the paper envisages to explicate the idea that Foucault's main intention of dismantling the traditional enlightenment concept of universal truth and objective progress with a particular emphasis on 'Power and Knowledge' reciprocity is made clear to have been manifested as something potent forces in geo-political dynamics recently. Although, the original Foucauldian text's description was found in a peaceful, diffused, consensus-oriented validation and practices within the accepted regime of truth (of society) in the form of docile submission in medical practices, a panopticon concept of prison, and conventional school disciplines, etc., its heterogeneity of being the motivational spirit behind the drastic changes, something that unprecedentedly disturbed the political equilibrium nowadays, is what is found implicated in this research work. What Foucault sees it as a dormant, a net-like network pervades everywhere, can be ignited and can get erupted anytime like what had happened in recent geo-political turmoil. Considering the Cockroach Janata Party movement as a (satirical) voice of the voiceless, a re-definition of laziness and shifts in work culture in new era, the preceding Foucault's concept of power is an eye-opening one in this context.

Pragmatically, it is a red flag for law makers and those who responsible for execution that anything which doesn't impress public or done away with coercion and compulsive despotic rule, can literally be overturned without formal legal sanctions following the counter-narrative disseminated by the public. What happened in Nepal Gen Z movement is an epitome of justice against corruption amongst the elites and bureaucrats, the echoes of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka political turmoil revealed the uncanny power dynamics unleashed from a single dimensional nature.



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