

Power in R. K. Narayan's *Malgudi Days*

LA PUISSANCE DANS LES JOURS DE MALGUDI DE R.K. NARAYAN

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Received 29 January 2012; accepted 31 March 2012.

Abstract

The present study aims to consider Foucauldian 'Power' and its dimensions in the select short stories of R. K. Narayan's *Malgudi Days* (1982). To that end, Foucauldian 'Hegemony' and 'Resistance to Power and Limits of Power' are discussed in these select short stories: "The Blind Dog", "Forty-Five a Month", "A Willing Slave", "Leela's Friend", and "Selvi". The study further shows the way the clusters in turn are related to each other and at the same time contribute to the Foucauldian concepts. Furthermore, Foucauldian 'Hegemony' and 'Resistance to Power and Limits of Power' are created through 'Power' which exists in various forms.

Key words: Michel Foucault; Power; Resistance to power; Limits of power; Hegemony

Résumé

La présente étude vise à examiner la "Puissance" foucauldienne et ses dimensions dans les histoires courtes de certains jours Malgudi RK Narayan (1982). À cette fin, «L'hégémonie» foucauldienne et la «Résistance au pouvoir et les limites de la puissance» sont discutés dans ces histoires courts sélectionnés: "le chien aveugle", "Un mois de la Quarante-Cinq", "Un esclave volontaire", "Ami de Leela", et le "Selvi". L'étude montre en outre la façon dont les grappes à leur tour sont liés les uns aux autres et en même temps contribuer à des concepts foucauldien. En outre, «L'hégémonie» foucauldienne et «Résistance au pouvoir et limites de la puissance» sont créés par "Power" qui existe sous diverses formes.

Mots clés: Michel Foucault; Puissance; La résistance au pouvoir; Les limites de la puissance; L'hégémonie

Moslem Zolfagharkhani, Siranoush Akhgarandouz (2012). Power in R. K. Narayan's *Malgudi Days*. *Canadian Social Science*, 8(2), 28-33. Available from URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/j.css.1923669720120802.1010> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.css.1923669720120802.1010>

INTRODUCTION

"Where there is power, there is resistance." (Michel Foucault, 1978, p.95)

Foucauldian definition of 'Power' is completely different from the definitions of traditional liberal and Marxist theorists of 'Power'. For Foucault, 'Power' is essentially productive and not repressive; he writes in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), "Power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth" (p.194). For analyzing power, it should be considered that power relationships within a society can not be limited to the study of a series of institutions, since power relations are deep-rooted in the whole network of the social. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1* (1978) written by Michel Foucault focuses on the basic network of power relation: "...the principle of power-as-law, namely the fact that there is no escaping from power, that it is -already present..." (p.82). Power is omnipresent at every level of the social body and it operates at the most micro levels of social relations.

Exercising power is strategic and war-like. Another crucial book is *The History of Sexuality Volume II: The Use of Pleasure* (1985) written by Michel Foucault. He remarks, "...the analysis of power relations and their technologies made it possible to view them as open strategies, while escaping the alternative of a power conceived of as domination or exposed as a simulacrum"

(p.4-5). Also, in the following volume *The History of Sexuality Volume III: The Care of the Self* (1986), Foucault defines power and its relations in some contexts. He mentions: “‘Power’ defines as one exercises power within a network in which one occupies a key position which is always the ruler and the ruled. Those with power operate within a “field of complex relations” (Foucault, 1986, p.87-88).

Foucault recommends that there are a number of ways in which the exercises of power can be resisted. He argues that resistance is co-extensive with power, specifically as soon as there is a power relation; there is a possibility of resistance. Foucault asserts in *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume I* (1978) “...power employs nothing more than a law of prohibition” (p.84). Foucault focuses on power manifestation in different situations: “...in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies” (p.92-93). It does not mean that power is stable but it exists in mobile relation (p.94). Foucault affirms:

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power, should it be said that one is always “inside” power, there is no “escaping” it, there is no absolute outside where it is concerned...their existence depend on a multiplicity of points resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. (p.95)

Between power and resistance is a matter of quite specific and changing struggles in space and time. There is always the possibility of resistance no matter how domineering the system. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977) Foucault asserts, “...but as a unity that derives from this very unity an increase in its forces; discipline increases the skills of each individual, coordinates these skills, accelerates movements, increases fire power, broadens the fronts of attack without reducing their vigour, increases the capacity for resistance” (p.210).

In an essay “Power, Freedom, and Individuality: Foucault and Sexual Difference”, Miri Rozmarin believes that “This distinction can add another parameter to the analysis of resistance by emphasizing the different effects of power on individuals” (p.8). Also, he tries to define the notions of ‘Power’ and “freedom” which also reveal the concept of ‘Resistance’. Millicent Dillon in “Conversation with Michel Foucault” asserts that “In human societies one can’t find political power without domination. But no one wants to be commanded thought very often a lot of situation, people accept it” (p.5). This domination is related to ‘Hegemony’ which causes ‘Resistance to Power and Limits of Power’.

Additionally, Hossein Pirnajmuddin and Fatemeh Shahpoori Arani discuss Foucauldian power in “Discourse and Power in George Bernard Shaw’s Pygmalion”. The authors affirm Foucault’s insight about power in modern age: “power is neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and that it only exists

in action” (p.168). Also, they discuss different aspects and dimensions of power relation. The authors consider a linguistic analysis of the characters’ conversational interaction which sheds more light on the power relations (p.168).

Hegemony is the political, economic, ideological or cultural power which is exercised by a dominant group over other groups. It requires the approval of the majority to keep the dominant group’s leader in power. In particular, Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci found the theory of cultural hegemony while Foucauldian hegemony is something that insists on ‘Resistance to Power and Limits of Power’.

The traces of ‘Hegemony’ can be followed in Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1977), “In short this power is exercised rather than possesses; it is not the ‘privilege’, acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions-an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated” (p.26-27). It does not mean that the minority does not enjoy power when Foucault asserts that ‘Power’ is everywhere even in resisting of power. The term is often mistakenly used to suggest brute power or dominance; hence it is better giving emphasis to how control is achieved through agreement not force.

Hegemony theory explains board power relationships and somehow a shift in power from the hegemonic mode of ‘Power over’ to an intensive notion of power from within. “In fact, to the extent that we can distinguish between ‘dominant’ and ‘determining’ factors in power, hegemony would be ‘dominant’ and force would be ‘determining’ ” (Blommaert, 2005, p.167). As a result, Foucauldian hegemony does not limit the power to the specific groups. Also, in the following volume *The History of Sexuality Volume III: The Care of the Self* (1986), the trace of ‘Hegemony’ can be pursued, he asserts: “In social, civic, and political life, it had to bring certain dissociation into play between power over the self and power over others” (p.95). In Michel Foucault’s *The Archaeology of knowledge* (1969), the history of discourse is shown. He mentions: “Difference...is this dispersion that we are and make” (p.103).

Nick J. Fox in “Foucault, Foucauldians and Sociology” declares the application of Foucauldian perspectives within sociology. He discusses different dimensions of power network relationships and “...resistance to power becomes possible, why some people resist and others do not...” (p.424). Also, it can be observed in “Modes of Knowledge and Patterns of Power” by Maurice Kogan. Kogan asserts that “although social order is imposed by force, it derives its permanence and stability through techniques of legitimation, ideology, hegemony, mobilisation of bias, false consensus and so on which secure the willing compliance of citizens through the manipulation of their beliefs” (p.11).

Nasser Maleki and Maryam Navidi declare Foucauldian approach in "Foucault's Idea of Power in Shelley's *Mont Blanc*". The authors mention "There is a dominating power in every society; a power which imposes its own ideology on the people" (2011, p.96). In other parts, they discuss Foucauldian perspective: "He believes that every society is unconsciously under the dominant and hidden control of one power, which runs through every aspects of society, causing all the economic, social and political forces to get shaped" (p.97). Also, Soudabe Gholami asserts power's role in "Resistance to the Discourse of Death in *Nothing to Be Frightened of* by Julian Barnes in the Light of Michel Foucault". The author's discussion is about power's resistance. She debates how power is exercised, "While rejecting the negativity of power and replacing it with the productivity of it, Foucault argues that power can be resisted as well. It should be noted that productivity can be closely associated with resistance since resistance can give way to more production in different fields..." (2011, p.125).

Moslem Zolfagharkhani asserts different dimension of power which is operating in societies:

embodied in the lives of people with very real bodies saying things to each other, in their actual languaging, which includes uttering explanations, commands, dismissals, threats, promises as well as giving indications of acceptance, abeyance, compliance, submission or agreement. (p.1)

Zolfagharkhani discusses power over body:

Power exerted on humans can be either directly, or by direct physical one over the body. The case in point is when one is imprisoned or killed, and then power is at work both physically and directly. A body is, further, under power when punishment or reward is used as elements of inducement. One may also be influenced by the power over opinion for which propaganda is an appropriate example. (p.1-2)

Zolfagharkhani defines social organizations like churches, schools, hospitals, and political institutes and institutes that exert different forms of power depending on the target and the way of achieving exercise of power. The Law is another important derivation for power in communities. Hence, the Law is a set of regulations that is exercised by the State in order to deal with its own citizens. Also, power can be divided into two typical forms of power run in the political history of human societies. One is traditional power which is based upon habits and the other is naked power which is usually employed military as its tool. (2011, p.2)

Different forms of social and political organization give power to different types of individuals so that different states of society appear. Previously, the king was on the top of the power's pyramid, and while having his most own will-power, the fate of his people, whether with legitimacy or none, is in his hands (Zolfagharkhani, 2011, p.3-5). Nevertheless nowadays, "Power as right and capacity results in the necessity of a Government. Therefore, Government is constituted based on some

people's and organization's expectations to observe the operation and practice of some laws" (p.6). The rest of the community should obey these laws.

In "The panoptic and the world in Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*", Moslem Zolfagharkhani asserts:

Foucault's main discussion is on the power of religion, politics, and economics and the formation of sexuality. His observation in *The History of Sexuality* (1978) is relevant here: "... sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden. ... power prescribes an order" for sex that operates at the same time as a form of intelligibility: sex is to be deciphered on the basis of its relation to the law ... power acts by laying down the race: power's hold on sex is maintained through language, or rather through the act of discourse that creates,... (2010, p.58-59).

In this article the Modern Man is, "...according to Foucault, kept in a carceral network, which is architecturally represented by Panopticon in which anyone may come and exercise in the central tower the functions of surveillance" (p.64). The gaze takes different forms and shapes and is exercised upon others. Zolfagharkhani defines Foucauldian panopticon as a kind of laboratory of power where power is exercised. (p.60)

R. K. Narayan's select short stories in *Malgudi Days* (1982) are the site for power relations. The author's realistic narration is considerable no matter how his writing style is simple. He focuses on ordinary people and writes about the details of Indian society without modifying his simplicity. According to Narayan "... some stories may prove to be nothing more than a special or significant moment in someone's life or a pattern of existence brought to view" (p.viii). It is an aspect of life that is merely imaginative and attempts at controlling life. The researchers followed the traces of 'Hegemony' and 'Resistance to Power and Limits of Power' in his select short stories by the help of realistic styles. He has presented the reality in the society which is under the control of 'Power'. These concepts can be found in characterization, manners, dialogues, words, context, and discourse in these select short stories: "The Blind Dog", "Forty-Five a Month", "A Willing Slave", "Leela's Friend", and "Selvi".

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

R. K. Narayan (1906-2001) was an Indian author whose works of fiction contain a series of books about people and their communities in an imaginary town in India. He is one of the pioneers of Indo-Anglian fiction, and an Indian writer of English language novels and short stories. The chief reason is that he is credited with bringing Indian literature in English and introduces it to the rest of the world. Narayan's first four books include the semi-autobiographical trilogy of *Swami and Friends* (1935), his famed works consist of *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The Dark Room* (1938), *The English Teacher* (1945), *The*

Financial Expert (1952), *The Guide* (1958), *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961), *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), *Malgudi Days* (1982), and *The Grandmother's Tale* (1993). *Malgudi days* (1982) is a collection of short stories which demonstrates the dimension of power relations.

This study aims is to unite and illustrate the particular Foucauldian concepts to Narayan's select short stories: "The Blind Dog", "Forty-Five a Month", "A Willing Slave", "Leela's Friend", and "Selvi". Not only R. K. Narayan's writing style is noticeable because of his simplicity and delicate humor but also because his narratives focus on social context and arrange for feeling of everyday life and present sympathetic humanism. From specific point of view, 'Hegemony', 'Resistance to Power and Limits of Power' are within the relation between settings of culture and language which perform the whole system of society under the domination of power. It can be studied in different aspects of life and in different societies especially the ones where the historical background of colonization and domination of powers over the culture exist. 'Hegemony' has the goal both in dialogues and actions which comprises meaningful elaborations on cultural, social, and historical patterns. The researchers follow Michel Foucault in this application. Domination of hidden 'Power' in Indian societies can be followed as an example because these are problematic matters all over the world. (Blommaert, 2005, p.2)

Michel Foucault as a well-known French philosopher and sociologist is an influential figure in twentieth-century. His eminence is as a result of his writings on power and its dimensions, on knowledge and discourse which have been widely influential in academic circles. The study attempts to work on 'Hegemony' and 'Resistance to Power and Limits of Power' as fundamental concepts of Foucault's works. Talk over 'Power' is principal in Foucault's works. The notion of instrumental using of power contains "the governing and ordering medium of every institution" (Selden, 1993, p.129). In the word of Foucault, ordering, rule, and power are inseparable and identical which prove 'Hegemony' in social context. Foucauldian approach frequently portrays the concept of 'Power' and power relations. Foucault asserts in an interview "The ethics of the concern for self as a practice of freedom":

Power relations are extremely widespread in human relationships. Now this does not mean that political power is everywhere, but that there is in human relationships a whole range of power relations that may come into play among individuals, within families, in pedagogical relationships, political life etc...Liberation is sometimes the political or historical condition for a practice of freedom. Taking sexuality as an example, it is clear that a number of liberations was required vis-à-vis male power...But this liberation does not give rise to the happy and full essence of a sexuality in which the subject has achieved a complete and satisfying relationship. Liberation paves the way for new power relationships, which must be controlled by practices of freedom (1961-1984, p.434).

In other parts he gives a picture of power relations

which can be led to 'Hegemony', 'Resistance to Power and Limits of Power'. He clarifies power relations in "The Subject and Power":

What is to be understood by the disciplining of societies in Europe since the eighteenth century is not, of course, that the individuals who are part of them become more and more obedient, nor that all societies become like barracks, schools or prisons; rather, it is that an increasingly controlled, more rational and economic process of adjustment has been sought between productive activities, communications networks, and the play of power relations (Foucault, 1961-1984, p.339).

'Hegemony' and 'Resistance to Power and Limits of Power' can offer specific methods to the analysis of 'Power', effects of power, and power relations. According to Foucault, "Power is a relation between forces or rather relation between forces is a power relation" (Mills, 1997, p. 16). In all of the select short stories, the effects of power are depicted in different forms. Foucault's analytical and novel book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) clarifies how man has become an object of 'Power-Knowledge' which is both "bound up in a complex network of relations" (Carrette, 2000, p.19).

"The Blind Dog" proves the power relationship which is interrelated. The owner of dog abused his dog and limits dog's freedom which makes 'Limits of Power'. Consequently, at the end, a desire of freedom forces the dog to run away. Accordingly, "The blind man threw a handful of food, which the dog ate gratefully. It was perhaps an auspicious moment for a starting friendship" (Narayan, 2006, p.27), but his need for food overpowers his desire for freedom, and necessity wins. The traces of 'Limits of Power' can be found easily when "He lost his freedom completely. His world came to be circumscribed by the limits of the white cord which the ribbon-vendor had spared" (p.29). The emphasis on the words "discipline", "limits" and "freedom" demonstrates the power relation which leads to 'Hegemony' and this power relation forms 'Resistance to Power'.

The existence of father role, manager, and boss in "Forty-Five a Month" proves the hegemonic relation. In this story, father becomes the slave in his job as a consequence of economic status of his family. The different economical classification is vivid in this story which is related to 'Hegemony'. In other parts, there are external conflicts in this story which are between teacher of daughter, father of family and his boss, and between the father and daughter. These conflicts may point to 'Resistance to Power and Limits of Power'. In this short story repetition of words such as "father", "teacher" and "master" displays the owner of power. In addition, it illustrates 'Hegemony' in ordinary relationship in some speeches such as "The teacher gave her permission to leave" (Narayan, 2006, p.75). For tracing 'Power', 'Hegemony', and emphasis on 'Resistance to Power and Limits of Power' one may consider the reference: "He wasn't slave who had sold himself for forty rupees

outright" (p.78).

In "A Willing Slave", Ayah is discriminated against and treated badly because she is an uneducated servant, "Half an hour later she walked out of the house, led by a husband proud of his slave" (Narayan, 2006, p.131). In "A Willing Slave", Ayah seems to have been oppressed by her employers. Her "self-imposed tasks" seems unappreciated and even when her husband takes her away, he feels "proud of his slave". "A Willing Slave" declares the word "salve" in the title of the short story and also manifests the 'Hegemony' at the end of the story. Even the servant as a main character has her own power in *Malgudi Days*: "She constituted herself a time-keeper and those who came late for work could not escape her notice" (p.126). In other parts, the writer points that "she viewed all teachers as her enemies and all schools as prison houses" (Narayan, 2006, p.127). Using disciplinary words reveals the fact that both power and resistance to it are present.

The notions of power between upper and middle class can be traced easily even in "Leela's Friend". The chief character of this short story is Siddah. Siddah is immediately assumed to be a thief simply because he already was a criminal. "Leela's Friend" asserts the connection between master, servant, and police which declares the different stages of power. The triangle relation of power manifests the domination and dominating focus. It depicts that even in the minority there is power and resistance. In "A Willing Slave", and "Leela's friend" the servants' characterization depicts the power of upper class and their domination on minority which leads to 'Hegemony' and makes 'Resistance' in their manners.

In "Selvi", Mohan uses Selvi as an emotionless model. He gives her a "script" to follow. Mohan's power is because of money and his personal fame. In this story, references are made to the dominating of masters and the resistance of Selvi. Power develops through the minority which resists domination. She says: "Please leave me out of all this, and leave me alone, I want to be alone hereafter. I can't bear the sight of anyone..." (Narayan, 2006, p.164). However, her emotion does not seem to be affected because of her 'Resistance to Power and Limits of Power'. Although Mohan controls her body, and he has domination on her activities but he is unable to control her mind. But controlling body is one of the instrumental using of power. At the end, she rebels and goes back to live in her old house. There are traces of 'Hegemony' within the story along with the fact that power exists everywhere.

CONCLUSION

Narayan's works display Indian people's everyday life simply. His select short stories depict the main role of characters in society within connections and relationships. Also, power's distribution in Indian context is discussed

on the light of Foucauldian concepts which are interrelated. Furthermore, one "can distinguish between 'dominant' and 'determining' factors in power, hegemony would be 'dominant' and force would be 'determining'." (Blommaert, 2005, p.167). Additionally, most of Indian's texts make the all-important connections between 'dominant' on the one hand and 'determining' on the other hand. Hence, such writings help move the minority away from the margins into the center. For that reason, 'Resistance to Power and Limits of Power' explores the controlling power. Hence, Foucauldian power exists in different contexts and environment. Power's possessing exchanges between two sides of relationships. One side operates authority which means 'Hegemony', and other side reacts against it and makes 'Resistance to Power and Limits of Power'.

Furthermore, attempts were made to portray the role of power in the select stories according to characters' reactions in everyday life. Also, it was followed in animal and human connection discussed in "The Blind Dog". "Forty-Five a Month", "A Willing Slave", "Leela's Friend", and "Selvi" present the different aspects of relationships between master and employee or member of staff. The instances which cause 'Hegemony' depend on money in "Forty-Five a Month", or on master and employee relationships in "A Willing Slave", and "Selvi" or on different ranks and positions portrayed in "Leela's Friend". Reading the works of Narayan unravels the invisible and hidden power which forces human beings in everyday life. Hence, the endeavor of analyzing works of Narayan is an attempt at grasping the reality in parts. Narayan matters because Literature matters.

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