Understanding Michel Foucault (1926-1984)

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Abstract – In this paper sexuality does not involve the denial of biological functions but tries to vision how deployments of power are directly connected to the body, history of bodies where biological and historical factor interconnect in complex relations. Sex was developed as an essential property underlying bodies and physiology. Sex was indispensable, theoretically for grouping anatomy, conduct, biology etc and pleasure for reifying a secret causality. Epistemology of sex gained momentum from its proximity to biology and biology provided principles of normalization. The idea of sex turned around or reversed the representation of power to sex, treating power as law and dominating sex. Sex is the most Abstract creation of power. Sex serves access to one's identity (nameless urge) and intelligibility (madness) leading to care and respect for sex a value stronger than life.

Keywords: Formation, Genealogy, Govern mentality, Knowledge, Power

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INTRODUCTION

Michel Foucault is one the most prominent philosopher of Social Sciences within post modern and cited my most of the scholars in their work. Born in 1926 to a French family, Foucault soon rose to the level of other philosopher. He was influenced by thinkers like Marx, Althusser, Nietzsche, Kant, Heidegger and others. His main interests are history of ideas, epistemology, historical epistemology, ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of literature, philosophy of technology and others. There are numerous ideas of Foucault that have been used by many philosophers today, but his notable ideas are bio politics, disciplinary institution, discourse analysis, discursive formation, genealogy, governmentality, power-knowledge, panopticism, subjectivation and others. His ideas have influenced scholars like Edward Said, Nikolas Rose and other. Foucault has constructed his ideas in his writings which are published in books like *Archeology of knowledge, history of sexuality, power-knowledge, madness and civilization*and others. This paper will explore major thoughts of Foucault and explicate his ideas of genealogy, archeology, power, power-knowledge, power relations, technologies of self, bio-power, governmentality and history of sexuality.

ARCHAELOGY AND GENEAOLOGY:

Before moving towards Foucault's idea of discourse, power-knowledge, power-relations, technologies of the self, bio power, governmentality and history of sexuality, it is significant to understand his concept of *genealogy* and *archaeology*. Talking about *genealogy*, it is a philosophy and a historical method or a technique where one questions the universal philosophy or social belief. It is opposed on focusing on singular overriding discourse or an understanding. The terminology was first used by Friedrich Nietzsche. In his writing "*on the genealogy of morals"* he used this term to critique or question modern morality where he said that it developed into its existing form through power relations. It was later that Foucault in his writing "*Nietzsche, Genealogy and History"* that he inflated the concept of *genealogy* to counter the position of truth or universal history where the evolution of mankind, society et al exists. By *genealogy* he meant the deconstruction of the truth and contradicts the past that exposes how power had influence on truth. One can take an example of Alexander and how while invading Egypt he took historians, philosophers and others to expunge the knowledge which was there and replaced it with his own interest and influence. So, Foucault seeks to deconstruct such truth and understand how power had influenced in the construction of truth or universal history. He questioned the notion of how history progresses in a linear order or a truth by applying the concept of genealogy to scratch a true understanding without being biased towards the whole idea of universal truth. According to him, there are three domain of genealogy. First; a historical ontology of oneself in relation to truth through which one constitute oneself as subjects of knowledge. Second; a historical ontology of oneself in relation to the field of power through which one constitute oneself as subjects acting on others. Third; a historical ontology in relation to ethics through which one constitute oneself as moral agents. The notion and practice of *genealogy* is

closely associated with the concept of *archeology* which Foucault explains.

Foucault in his writing "*archeology of knowledge*" uses the concept of *archeology.* When one talks about archaeology one understands that it is the process where the evidence and proofs are revealed with the historians scratch in order to understand the history and evolution period. One can take an example of MohenjoDaro which was discovered by archeological excavation and found the whole settlement throughout the region of Baluchistan and North West India. Foucault's understanding about archeology was something different. His concept is focused more on discourse and analysis of a statement. He sees statements as an important factor for rules in a larger field of discourse. How statements and points claim of true is constructed within a discipline. He looks to break transformation in order to understand production of meaning and knowledge. He says that discontinuity is something like a temporary dislocation which the historians look to remove it, according to him one should seek to find out such discontinuity. He says that history is produced in such a way that historians leave no clue for questions and they direct historical analysis away from search of new rationality. The theme of such interpretation and possibility of such total history has disappeared but an emergence of general history. The problem that arises out of this is the task of general history which would determine what forms of legitimacy are defined and series. It is not only series but series of series or in other words tables possible to draw up. To him, discourse must not be referred as distant presence of origin but treated as when it occurs. He then talks about unity of discourse which is the interplay of the rules that define the transformations of objects, their non identity through time and internal discontinuity that suspends their permanence.

DISCOURSE:

One should now understand is Foucault's idea *from language to discourse.* Here Foucault studied not only language but discourse as a system of representation. Normally when one uses the terminology *discourse* it is used in a linguistic concept, it simply means association between language/speech and writing, it is the flow between two. Very closely related with the term *historiography.* M. Foucault gave a different meaning to it and it is significant to understand what he means by it. He was interested in rules and practices which produced useful/meaningful statements and he synchronized discourse in different historical periods. By *discourse* he meant a group of statements which provide a language for talking about way of representing knowledge, particular topic at a particular period of time. According to him "*Discourse is all about production of knowledge through language. But since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do, conduct and all practices have a discursive aspect.*" It is important to note that discourse is not only linguistic but *language and practice* as it distinguishes what one says and what one does.

Discourse produces objects of our knowledge. It presides over the way topic can be meaningfully spoken about and reasoned about. It influences how ideas are put into practice and used to adjust the behavior of others. Discourse limits and restricts other ways of talking, conducting oneself in relation to a topic or construction of knowledge about it. Discourse does not consist of one idea, one thought, statement, text, actions and source in fact it is the way of thinking, state of knowledge to which Foucault referred to as *episteme*will appear across a range of texts and as forms of conduct at a number of different institutional sites within society. Foucault was more of constructionist, he wanted to create knowledge not through text but discourse and nothing has any meaning outside discourse.

The concept of discourse is aboutwhere meanings, knowledge comes from. He argues that one can only have knowledge of things which has a meaning, without meaning it is irrelevant. *Episteme* (different discourse) will emerge at later historical moment, displacing the existing one, opening up a new formation and producing in its turn where new concepts will emerge like punishment, madness, sexuality and others. New discourse with power and authority will emerge. Foucault did not believe that same phenomena will be found across different historical period he believed in each period discourse produces its own knowledge which is different from one another with no continuity.

POWER KNOWLEDGE:

However, in his later work Foucault was moving beyond the idea of discourse to power/knowledge which can be seen in his writing *power/knowledge*. When one talks about power it is always understood in one dimension moving from top down model of understanding the concept of power. One can take different scholars like Morgenthau, Hobbs, Cox, Mershimier, Thomas Shelling and others whose understanding of power was mostly based on state centric approach or in one direction. Foucault focused on relationship between power and knowledge and how power operated in institutional equipment and techniques. Foucault's institutional apparatus of punishment includes elements like linguistic non linguistic, discourse, institutions et al. The apparatus is always emblazoned or inscribed in power but is always linked with knowledge. This idea vision knowledge as constant inextricably entangled in relation to power because it was always applied to regulation of social order. This relation between discourse, knowledge and power market an important development of constructionist approach.

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This brought Foucault's interest closer to sociological theories of ideology. Foucault consistently went against classical Marxism because it tends to minimize all relation between knowledge and power to class power and class interest. Foucault conceived the linkage between power and knowledge and said that not only power determines knowledge but knowledge also determines power. Knowledge linked with power not only assures the authority of truth but has the power to make itself truth. According to Foucault "*knowledge once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and discipline of practices. Thus, 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.*"

According to Foucault, knowledge does not operate in empty space. It is functioned through certain technologies and strategies of application, in specific situations, historic contexts and institutional regimes. For example in order to understand a crime one must understand how the combination of power/knowledge has produced specific conception of crime. This made Foucault to speak of discursive formation sustaining *regime of truth*. By regime of truth he means the type of discourse that harbors and causes to function as true, the instances which enables one to distinguish true from false epistemology and the way in which each is sanctioned. In human and social sciences Foucault said "*Truth is not outside power. Truth is a thing of this world; it is produced not only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. It induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth; that is the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned. The status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.*"

Now Foucault was moving ahead with the definition of power creating a new definition of the terminology *power*. For Foucault power has many direction and dimension, it does not perform in single form of a chain or a top down model. It circulates and is not monopolized by one centre. It is positioned and exercised through net like organization like a web. This shows that we are at certain point caught up in this circulation of power either oppressor or oppressed. Power relation fills all level of social existence and is found to be operating in every social life that would be family, sexuality, public politics, economy and law. According to him, power is not only repressing but also productive. Foucault said *"Power doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no but it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. Power needs to be thought as a productive network which runs through the whole social body."* Foucault confronted the understanding that power is used by

people or group by way of periodic act of dominance. For him, 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 regime of truth that encompasses society and which is in con continuous instability and negotiations. He uses the term power/knowledge to indicate that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, truth and scientific understanding.

For him, truth is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of limitations. It induces regular effects of power. Each society has its own regime of truth and general politics, that is the type of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is authorized, the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth, the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

These *general politics* and *regimes of truth* are the result of scientific discourse and institutions, and are redefined constantly through the education system, the media, and the instability of political and economic ideologies. In this sense, the *battle for truth* is not for some absolute truth that can be discovered and accepted, but is a battle about 'the rules according to which the true and false are separated and specific effects of power are attached to the true, a battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays.

Foucault reallocates our attention away from ostentatious or majestic overall strategies of power towards localized circuits, tactics, mechanism and current through which power circulates. He talks about *micro physics of power* by which he means that power relation penetrates right down to the society and they connect the way power is actually working on the ground to the great pyramid of hierarchal system of power which he refers to as *capillary movement*.By this he is not saying that human behavior, power, bodies, gesture is determined by power at this level but such power in form of behavior bodies and local relations of power which should not be seen as a simple projection of centre power.

For Foucault, power is exercised from innumerable points, in the non egalitarian and mobile relations. Relations of power are immanent in other types of relations. Power comes from below, there is no binary opposition between the ruled and the ruler. Where there is power there is always resistance, resistance is not exterior to power. One is always inside power, there is plurality of resistance which exists in the field of power relations. Discourses can be an affect or instrument of power but there may also be a point of resistance. Discourse transmits and produces power but it also undermines and exposes it. He opposes the

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concept of repression because the concept is only about the affect of power as repression. It is juridical concept of power. Repression according to him is a negative conception of power and it is incomplete. According to him "*Power produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge and produces discourse.*"

Foucault places the body at the centre of struggle between different forms of *power/knowledge*. The technique of regulation is applied to this body. Different discursive formation and apparatuses divide, classify and inscribe the body differently in their respective regimes of power and truth. In Foucault's *discipline and punishment* he explores various ways in why the body of a criminal is produced and disciplined in different punishment regimes in France. In the initial period prisons were open where people could walk around and punishment was in form of brutal torture and execution. It was visible to everyone. Modern form is more of disciplined, organized, private and away from public. Body has become discipline here. Body is produced within discourse in different form of knowledge and power. Discipline objectifies people on whom it is applied. This type of power forms body of knowledge about the individuals it disciplines rather than deployment of visible signs of sovereignty.Population increases and growth of capitalism are interrelated. Disciplining techniques would not have been possible without the latter or useful without the former. Power is also a major source of social discipline and conformity. Their systems of surveillance and assessment no longer required force or violence, as people learned to discipline themselves and behave in expected ways.

Foucault's idea of Subject and Power is significant here. He focuses to make history of different modes where culture, human beings are made subjects. He talks about the process of objectivization where subjects are divided within or divided from others eg: good boy and bad boy, healthy and sick etc. He says that Power is exerted over things and gives the ability to destroy, modify, use or consume them. Exerted over body by external capacity. He says that communication, objectives and power relation overlaps which leads to a formation of blocks such as educational system where space, regulation and activities are organized and this includes all the three (power relations, objectives and communication). Power is control and conduct of conduct. When one talks about Power-Relations or Power it is always constituted in institutions but such institutions have flaws which are; Power-Relation is to ensure its own preservation which brings with it the risk of deciphering functions that are essential reproductive; Analyzing Power-Relations from a stand point of institutions one will seek to explain the origin of PR in institution.

Foucault says that power is deeply rooted in social factor eg: in society one act against another. There cannot be a society without power relations. In supporting such argument he brings out five points: a: Differentiation: when one act upon the actions of others.eg: judicial systems, traditions, economic, culture, language etc b: Types of objectives: objective persuedby those who act upon the others of others. eg: exercise of trade, accumulating profit etc c: Instrumental modes: how power is established by threat of arms, effect of speech, economic disparities etc d: Forms of institutionalization: mix traditional conditions, legal structures, manners of habit or fashion etc e:Degree of rationalization: to bring into play of power relations as actions in the field of possibilities may be more or less elaborate in terms of effectiveness of its instruments and the certainty of its results or again in proportion to the possible cost. The exercise of power is not a naked fact, an institutional given nor it is a structure that holds out or is smashed: it is something that is elaborated, transformed, organized, it endows itself with processes that are more or less adjusted to the situation. So for Foucault primary and fundamental power dominates the society. Contemporary society is visual of this. But the states have taken over so power relations have been govenmentalized.

TECHNOLOGIES OF THE SELF:

Foucault idea of Technology of self is a link between obligation to tell the truth and prohibition weighing on sexuality. Foucault identifies different technologies such as a: technology of production which focuses on production and transformation. b: technologies of sign system which is the use of signs, meanings, symbols etc. c: technologies of power which is the conduct of individuals. d: technologies of self which is something that permits individuals to effect by their own means or with help of others, certain number of observation on their own body, soul thought, conduct, way of being in order to transform themselves for happiness. When technology of self and power fuses it gives birth to governmentality.

BIOPOWER:

In Foucault's idea of biopower he says that it is the rationalization of problems presented to govern practices by the phenomena characteristic of group of living human beings constituted as population, health, sanitation, birth rate etc. How the state rationalizes health issues such as cancer, ebola, aids et al and makes people to go for test etc. this is how the idea of bio-power comes in. rationalizing the problems of population expansion and makes people produce less childrens as one can take an example of China's one child policy where the state controls the biology of making. Environmental degradation is another example where the state rationalizes such problems and make people control environmental degradation et al. Foucault then takes the idea of liberalism in biopolitics liberalism is analysed as a principle of rationality

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which is the rationale that obeys that this is specificity for maximization of freedom, trade etc. liberalism is a growing governmentality. Liberalism is technology of governmentality where the notion of democracy, free trade etc are accepted by people.

GOVERNMENTALITY:

Governmentality is another idea of Foucault where he says that how the mentality of the people is governed. State has governed our mentality in such a way that whatever they are doing we feel is for our own good. It creates a thought associated with their policies and we take it in such a way that it is ethical. Eg: Prince by Machiavelli taught prince to govern oneself, how to be governed and how to govern others, however *prince* was not acknowledge at that period of time but later it was used in Italy and France to govern the mentality of the people. Divine Origin theory which projected kings as Gods, they were considered equal to God and people would never go against the King and his decisions. This was how people were governed as they made such belief in people so that they would be easily controlled however the rulers wanted them to be. Papacy is another example where the Popes were considered as God and people was Governed because such notion had already penetrated inside their mind. When Ashoka won the battle of Kalinga, he adopted Buddhism and its practices through speech, writing and pillars at aihole, sarnath etc. this was how Ashoka controlled the mentality of people and made them think that their King is opposed to war and is preaching Buddhism. This made it easy for Ashoka to control them without any rivals in his Kingdom.

HISTORY OF SEXUALITY:

In Foucault's *history of sexuality* he talks about bio power, *right of death and power over life* in his volume I of the books. Here, Foucault talks about how sovereign exercised the right over life and death in juridical form of necessitating/requiring citizens to go to war and by being able to punish transgression with death. Power over life and death was a power of division which is power to seize things, bodies and time. Bodies take hold of life in order to suppress it. He says power has been transformed or evolved so that right to wage war is not based on defenceof the juridical rights of the sovereign but in defense of the biological life of populations. The population is exposed to death in war by nuclear threats for the administration, control and optimization of life. The death penalty used to be the reply of the sovereign to those who attack his will. Once power took the form of administrating life, it became more difficult to invoke the death penalty. As power to promote life or disallow, death ceased its public form and became private. Suicide became a conduct of study of sociologist due to the blankness or incomprehension powers that administered life.

According to him, power over life developed in two stages; *First*was disciplines which optimized the use of body's capacities. *Second* was bio-political regulations which supervised interventions in specific bodies such as health, birth, population and mortality. Disciplinary power formed barracks, workshops, school on the other hand bio-practices focused on migration, public health and demography. Bio-power developed both in discourse of analysis of ideology and wealth but mostly in tangible or concrete arrangements including deployment of sexuality.

Foucault puts forth that techniques of bio-power were indispensable for the development of capitalism, to configure bodies to machines, populations to economic processes, distinguishing, segregating and differentiating social orders. For him, modernity is characterized by the use of power-knowledge to interfere and control biological existence. Life no longer opposed alien random death from famine and plague. Power gained access to bodies and controlled them by administration when life of the species was on political strategies. The study of human beings evolved out of place in life out of history as subject of techniques of power-knowledge.

Normalization of technologies replaced juridical systems. Law depends on defining enemies and threatening death. Normalization depends on regulatory equipment which distributes values and utility, hierarchy via administration and measurement. Resistance to such power relied on life, appeal was made to needs and human potential. The rights to life, health, body, satisfaction and liberty from alienation are all forms of resistance to new sort of power.

Sex according to Foucault was important because it stands at the stage of discipline of the body and regulation of population. It was persued in minute details and in large political intervention. Sex became the point of application of a multitude of tactics. One can take an example of China's *one child policy* in this regard. Initially power operated in reality and blood that functioned symbolically. Now society operates through sexuality, power speaks to sexuality as an object of excitement, fear and targets use and control. An analysis of sexuality treated it as an effect with meaning-value which resulted from new technologies of power.

Sex is said to be something desirable, it reveals power and law and demands its right against domination. Sex is historically produced in the deployment of sexuality. Saying yes to sex in not saying no to power. One must break the idea of sex as an agent if one aims to counter power-knowledge. One needs to consider the possibility of new economy of bodies and pleasure, reflect on

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the irony that in deploying one thinks that liberation is at risk.

CONCLUSION:

In the light of above arguments one can see how Foucault developed his ideas and how his ideas itself evolved over a period of time. Foucault is widely respected by scholars and acknowledge what he has written making it easy for scholars to understand his philosophies. Foucault is one of the most prominent philosophers in post modern world. By explicating his ideas of genealogy, archeology, power, power-knowledge, power relations, technologies of self, bio-power, governmentality and history of sexuality one can say how power functions and how it is employed in order to control the activities of mankind making it clear to readers about the epistemology system and its flaws that has been produced and widely accepted for years.

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