

**Knowledge and Power: A Discourse for Transformation
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Knowledge is an asset to every individual and society. Both knowledge and power are much contested domains. The one who scrutinize knowledge also has power to confer in the lively matters. On the other hand those who seize power can exercise knowledge according to it. Braj Ranjan Mani in his book *Knowledge and Power*, tries to locate the established notion of knowledge and power, how it is being used from different perspective by different people. This book has its own uniqueness in terms of its content and discussion. Emphasis has been made to put forth the light upon the root cause of prevalent lacuna and marginalization of historically oppressed group in social, economic, cultural and political life. An effort has been made to see the world from an enlarged and emancipated perspective, so that change can transpire in the current nature of knowledge and power. For that, a massive reconstruction of established structures of oppression was advocated and a firm appeal to challenge the constructed ideas and prejudices for the self-criticism and self-struggle was recommended. The author is a staunch critique of socially constructed hierarchy and brahmanical order of 'Varna' system. His earlier work '*Debrahmanising History*' (2005) is also moved around these issues like caste and its consequences. He wanted to make knowledge available to everyone, so that everybody will be empowered and power will be equally distributed among the society members, then only a true democratic order can be setup. He tried to find out the alternatives for more ethical and liberal society. For that one has to start seeing with new eye or perspective to understand the knowledge, power and politics, so that right questions can be asked and hunt attempt is made to find out the answers beyond the failed frameworks.

He describes how a small section of minority in numbers is transforming the entire prevalent socio-economic, cultural and political arena according to their need and desire in which injustices and inequality is inherited. He further talks about how in a democratic order injustices and authoritarianism of few is maintained. He tries to probe the formation of world with a million millionaires and a billion hungry people and ask what went wrong. The structure of brahmanical order is being questioned and discussed that how it holds knowledge and power which is used as a derogatory and to suppress other lower strata. The author inquired the continuation of large scale injustices and

confinement of knowledge and power in hand of few which is contrasted with the high-tech and democratized formation of the society. 'Knowledge is no longer widely felt as an ideal; it is seen as an instrument' (p.172). He says that there are forces in society that do not allow resources and power to be distributed fairly. Further he made a point that democracy does not work good because of active involvement of people but due to the competition among elites for power. It is created and accepted in the society that there will always be winners and losers and life prefers talented few to be wealthy who will redeem the poor. These are justified on the name of nature that God has created others to serve the few who have the ability to hold the power and knowledge. Dominant hegemonic conditions are created which makes the oppressed accept that they are born degraded and subject to oppression. Domination of the majority by one group brutalizes over all. People are compelled to live a poor life but authority refuses to take any notice of such waste of human resources. He captured the hunger and food crises and explains how it works and how affluent people are becoming ignorant and arrogant towards these issues. The structures of school and university carry a hidden curriculum in pedagogical practices feeding the myths that reinforce the establish order. Those who suffer discrimination are thus diverted from locating the cause of their subordination in society. The people are made to invest more faith in the system then the system has in itself. The myth of merit and social mobility hide the truth that without equality of condition and opportunity, right to equality amounts to nothing. Old and obnoxious socio-religious fundamentals have subtly morphed into modern and secular scientific avatars. For elite knowledge has for long been a great source of power. As in 16th century Francis Bacon said 'knowledge itself is power' without love and justice knowledge and power would produce misery and strife not happiness and harmony. In his work he put emphasis upon 'Debrahmanization' so that 'lower caste' people can live an equal life and enjoy dignity and opportunity.

In the first chapter the author tries to understand the fundamentals like justice, liberty and equality. How despite these beautiful ideas dominant class has taken full advantage of democratic deficit to valorize the other marginalized groups and made them suppressed and dependent upon the mercy of the dominant few. Despite both the national and international norms of justice and equality people are marginalized under the mask of democracy, this is a clear abuse of knowledge and power. Even the scholarly works are based upon individual interests. 'Identity or location of the scholar (in terms of caste, class, gender, age, nationality) influence, if not determine, the orientation or emphasis of their work' (p. 66). In the second chapter Hobbes' notion of state of nature is discussed as an incomplete impression of the people, though there was fear and cohesion at that period of time, but also there was a feeling of commonness before the emergence of strong forms of government such as democracy, monarchy, etc. but the modern world order is more pathetic than the Hobbesian

state of nature, there power is accumulated in the hands of a few. Though things have changed from pre-modern era but the prevalent injustices are forwarded together with new forms and means into the modern world. The traditional religious order was countered by the people like Muhammad, Buddha and Jesus, but their emancipation and contributions were hijacked by the affluent and shaped into self serving interests with the color of modern secular world order. In the third chapter he discusses how media, publicity and pop culture is being used as a tool to promote elitist interest rather than its actual duty of creating awareness and acting as a check upon the state power. The concentration is shifted from empowering the masses to selling their half-truth with semi-empirical statistics as a custodian of commercial culture. In the next chapter understanding of the politics of knowledge is described at length. It is believed that the modern notion of power is not wealth but knowledge, as it is heard that 'not weapons, is the currency of power today, but that is knowledge, as Ernest Gellner made the point that 'at the base of modern social order stands not the executioner but the professor' (p. 172). In this section the author have discussed the scholarly work and argued that each and every scholar produces their own knowledge as the only reality. Ashish Nandy, Amartya Sen, are somewhere 'remain enthralled by the philosophical grandeur of brahmanic Hinduism' (p. 208). He says that these scholars are not immune from the brahmanic-Gandhian humbug. In the last chapter the author questioned the silence of the oppressed and argued that it is 'because their mind is submerged in the oppressor's language and education' (p. 261). Further he quoted Uday Prakash that 'the dead do not think and do not speak: when people do not think and speak, they are dead' (p. 261). Education is seen as the most important tool for the emancipation of mind. He said that now no Buddha, Jesus and Muhammad will come to struggle for the deprived, they themselves have to unite and start questioning the prevalent social, cultural, economic and political dominance of few. Only then the true democracy can be established and its fruits of justice, equality and liberty can be equally shared by all the people.

After going through this book my limited understanding of knowledge and power has widened. We had heard about the causes and consequences of poverty, hunger, dehumanization, suppression, etc. But the way the author has explained these things and its causes and consequences are very practical and authentic. He has challenged the present context of origin of poverty and hunger, brahmanization and dehumanization. He has taken a different position on such issues and challenges the different scholars and their given theories. He mentions that the other scholars are considering more the consequences of dominant elitism or culturalism prevailing in India rather than the practical reality of the subject. A huge source of other literary work is used to strengthen his arguments. The only thing which I found not so convincing is, his work is a complete reflection of marginalized perspective, despite his arguments which are valid

enough to map out the situation of the oppressed people, the others or dominant perspective is completely missing. Above all, I found this book worth reading.