

Understanding Power: A Study of Albert Camus and Milan Kundera

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ABSTRACT

Generally speaking, power is aimed at maintaining a strategy of getting something done by controlling the behaviour of others and pre-empting the threat of resistance. Further ramification of the term is lucidly expressed citing many examples from the plays of Albert Camus and Milan Kundera. Besides, some other situations are referred to show the effects of power. An attempt has been made in the present work to study theatre-talk from the point of view of our understanding of the world, bedecked with power and its limitations.

The paper presents all possible forms of power-relations and power-equations in verbal interactions. Relevant conversational extracts are discussed. The data source of the current study was taken from the proposed texts and the secondary data was taken from books, some theories and explanations. Our literature review contains sufficient data and insights which we have generally made use of.

This paper provides an alternative method of looking at power from the perspectives of rethinking the stereotypes, biases and ideology and argues with Foucault (1991) that resistance is also a form of power. We have suggested that Media, Newspapers, Politics, Journalism are accused of using language manipulatively and shape public opinion.

The play *Caligula* is a remarkable work written by Albert Camus. The paper presents the analysis of selected conversations, drawing vividly the enigma of human existence. To us, power is a disadvantage and ends in misery. History is replete with many examples of downfall of Empire.

Jacques and his Master passed through many trials and tribulation and ultimately suffered the cruel stroke of destiny. By the quick turn of events, both the servant and the Master find themselves in unexpected situation and swallowed the bitter pill at the end. One may not feel very happy about the series of absurd situations but it reveals an artistic manipulation of characters and episodes for a literary purpose. The playwrights by these deviations try to portray the meaninglessness of human existence in an equally meaningless world.

Keywords

Power, Hegemony, Decentred subjects, Biases, Subversions of Power

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Introduction

The concept of power is difficult to define precisely. At the simplest level, it is the ability of one individual to control the behaviour of another. It is also the ability of an individual or institutions to get something done or further making someone to do something against his/her will. One can think of the idea of authority, control, influence and resistance.

In control category, things like dominance, influence, ability to lead, ensuring status etc come to the forefront. This can be attained by issuing orders, threats, manipulating for the desired submission or even by exerting influence persuasively. Resisting the authority, i.e. "power – centre" is also another form of power. Authority may fail to gain obedience or compliance in some situations.

Structure

The paper is in three parts; the first makes some general observations of how power is expressed in languages. The second part analyses some of the dominant insights from the mainstream literature/research. The third part analyses select dialogues from Albert Camus' *Caligula* and Milan Kundera's *Jacques and his Master*. Besides, some other communicative situations too show the effects of power.

A: Many Facets of Power

Language is used to "mitigate", "mislead" and to "mask". To mitigate means to resolve and lessen the harshness; mislead means to deceive and "mask" implies to mask the reality. The evidence of use or misuse of power is evident in reporting of news, advertisement, political propaganda, literary texts even in talk among family members, teacher-students, doctor-patient, lawyers, judges, etc. Various speech acts are designed by speakers to get things done. People can also communicate their desires indirectly.

The concept of diglossia refers to the use of polite and refined language (high style) and low power style such as Hedges Intensifiers, Tag questions and Deitic phrases. Wide range of linguistic features foster impressions of status and intelligence. Accent and dialogue are one such; clearly demarcating the elite and the non elite users of language. Lexical diversity, idiomatic language uses indicate hierarchy in the society. Men and women talk differs to some extent in their use of language. Many people think that women talk less powerfully than men do.

Speakers use words to mislead their hearers. It conceals the speaker's real intention and distorts the message by manipulating the details of the situation. The devices used for the purpose are exaggeration, evasive messages, and lies. These prevent others from gaining power over them. There are many buzz words or evocative words that shape the beliefs and emotions of others. We can include metaphors here. "Politicians are like vultures" "time is money". So, the source of power is the use of Metaphors.

Use of power is also evident in the following:-

Address system, kinship terms, crude, coarse and vulgar expressions, indirect speech, the use of irony and sarcasm and equivocal communication. Political double speak is used by the "holders of power". Passivization, normalisation, modals are examples of resources of the language that like a double edged sword can kill or cure the interactants in a conversational setting.

Linguistic markers of the patriarchal powers, Gender Biases, Feminists' revolts are both sides two sides of the coin. As stated earlier, objective being either control the addressee or resist the addressor. Men's conversational dominance reflects their political and cultural dominance on women. It is said that women give priority to cooperation, solidarity and concentrate on building social bonds that hold communities together. Men tend to maintain a power relationship, a higher status compared to women who are assigned a subordinate role in the society and culture though the things are changing.

Literature Review

Language reflects society as witnessed by close co-relation between aspects of language and social hierarchies". Roger Fowler (1985:62) Phenomenon of everyday speech in many societies shows the effects of power. Max Weber (1992) regarded 'Power' in relation to inequality. Antonio Gramsci

(1971) drew a distinction between rule where exercise of power is known and 'hegemony' where it is so disguised as to involve rule with the consent of the governed. Noam Chomsky refers it to "manufacture of consent" of the people. (Chomsky: Understanding Power p318)

Critical Discourse Analysis is an emerging field of research. Norman Fairclough (1989:3) points out that 'language is the primary medium of social control and behaviour'.

We examined large number of articles, hypotheses and are benefitted by the insights on power. To quote a few they are Grice, Austen, Searles (1969) Brown and Levinson (1987) Fairclough (1989)

Kramarae, Schulz and O'Barr (1984) Jaworsia (1993). Louis Althusser (1971) focuses on repressive state apparatus such as army, police, church, political parties, mass media as proponents of certain values and beliefs. Among all these luminaries Foucault's idea on "power" that "power is everywhere". Existing in all kinds of relations seems to be very useful. He reiterates that power is manifest in different 'subjects position' not necessarily from 'top down' only. Foucault's idea of the 'decentred subject' needs a careful study.

We believe that 'omnipotent' power attitude is overdramatized. In our context of analysis of Dwight Bolinger's book: "Language, The Loaded Weapon", it is observed that, "euphemism" (downplaying one's aggression), dysphemism (exaggerating bad qualities of one's opponents and mystification the use of Jargon to conceal certain activities) play a contributory role to our understanding of power.

A study of speech acts designed by speakers to get hearers to do things to either by orders threats to produce compliance or by tact, persuasion to achieve the goal is a helpful device. It has been shown in a large variety of contexts that people tend to follow the directives or resist the imposition of arbitrary dominance.

Labov and Bernstein deal with cases of social inequality; former's New York experiment on social stratification and the latter's elaborate and restricted code in their use of powerful or powerless style as the case may be, are very insightful.

Research on Language and Power, George Lakoff (1973, 1975) is based on the claim that women have been socialised into low power rule by using a style of speech akin to feminine register. Many

studies highlight that women talk less powerfully than men do. Feminist researchers have identified area of language structure and use that favour a male perspective and are demeaning of women.

Power of conversation

Conversation is also a form of power. The talk is so sequenced that the group member who talks the most is most likely to emerge as a leader. By manipulating the 'turn allocation' and 'turn taking', a speaker exercises a dominant role in the conversation. Sacks et al (1974) has extensively studied these conversational features. We find that Grice's co-operative principle is more useful than other conversational theorists. Some cooperation is necessary for the communication to be effective. He enunciated four maxims: quality, quantity, relevance and manner. If we follow these maxims, we will be understood we can violate the maxims without being noticed (lying, flouting, opting out, 'Once such a communication situation arises, a hearer can infer what meaning exists beyond literal meaning (Implicature) Grice 1975

Resistance in Power

We have analysed various theories, insights, perspectives on power. Now we propose to dwell upon the counter perspective i.e., resistance to power. "Wherever there is power, there is resistance as well". (Foucault 1991)

James Scott elucidates the point well in his book, *Weapons of the Weak*. (1985). Some studies suggest that power is not easily subverted. Voloshinov and Bhaktin talk about 'polyphony of voices' is increasingly popular in literary analysis. In Indian political discourse, the word 'dalit' finds preference to 'harijan' because it challenges the hegemony of the ruling class by pointing to human rather divine causes.

Biases:

We come across many forms of biases: Gender, Occupation, Religion, Regions etc. To cite a few, 'manhole, mandate, manpower are heavily biased against women but at present, there are attempts to neutralise the biases and produce an egalitarian society.

Ethnocentrism:

We notice conflict between power and resistance. The primary meaning of ethnocentrism is the superiority dominance of one's culture and art over others. The debate regarding clash of civilisation between Orientals and the occident's is raised by Edward Said. (Orientalism, Culture, Imperialism). Authority which embodies power is

responsible for the inequalities it perpetuates and gives rise to revolt.

Foucault is looking at power from the point of view of resistance and discusses it as role of Individuals, Groups rather than of Institutions. So the fight goes on between males versus females, whites versus non whites, upper class versus lower class, children versus adults. One group resists the other when commanded. This is known as class struggle.

We live in an age of empowerment. Knowledge is power, it ensures status. It is construction of relations between the dominant groups with power and subordinate groups without power. Marx pleaded for overthrowing power by the powerless. Power in our opinion is responsibility. That has to be ensured at all cost.

The working material for this paper is from the play *Caligula*, Jack and His Master written by Albert Camus and Milan Kundera respectively.

Consider 'Caligula'. Its plot revolves around Caligula, a Roman Emperor famed for his cruelty and insane behaviour. Bei Hu (2010) calls him "a monster of absurdity". Life to him is futile, 'a speck of dust' "in tune with Camus' existential philosophy. After his sister, Drusilla's death, he instituted a reign of terror, having patricians murdered, their sons killed and their daughter forced to work in brothels. He stretched the concept of power to the extreme. It is an instance of absolute power. "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely". (Lord Acton). Power is a license to kill people and taste authority to the full, a sense of gross misuse. His understanding of freedom is foolish as he is the "only free man in the world". Any challenge to him is ruthlessly dealt with.

Caligula wanted 'Moon' 'Happiness' and Eternal Life'. The tyrant stares at the moon and wonders why he can't reach it. He believes that he is a God and can do anything he wishes. His utterances are vague and ambiguous. His subjects imagine that there is something profound behind his meaningless phrases. The timid masses fail to discover the tyrant's eccentricity. We draw attention to several moves of Caligula to perpetuate his grip on power and leadership.

First move (1) to disinherit the children and make a will to deposit his money to the state after killing the holders of small or big capital. The ultimate power is the power to get the people do as you wish and people with no support base will

depend upon you. This is a ploy to emasculate the subjects and eliminate any form of challenge. Bismarck's "Iron and Blood" policy and Machiavelli's sermon, better to be feared than loved" are synonymous with Caligula's arrogance. His projection as larger than life, planted the seeds of his own destruction.

To Cesonia, power is madness. One cannot be God on earth. One cannot block the sun by putting an umbrella. To Caligula, "I want to drown the sky in the sea...to infuse ugliness with beauty...to wring a laugh from pain". These are examples of "power megalomania".

The first act presents Caligula an enigmatic figure with determination to put all state machineries to death without any trial. Soon however his power reaches a peak, everything turns against him.

The action swings in the opposite direction in the second act. Series of criminal deeds ensued. Scipio's father was killed; wife forced to prostitution. Lepidus' son was killed too. These stirred up resentment. Cheria, Cesonia, pleaded restraint; cunningness "fighting an imperial madman in the full flush of his power". A perfect courtier should play the game of deception and send misleading signals to him.

Caligula is ruthless. He is on his way to execute the knight. Musicus' wife was sent to Caligula. Old patrician had a faint protest but Caligula was unsparing and did not let his guard down.

Caligula's misadventure was not limited to spreading terror, bloodshed, death. His recitation of poetry as a purgative did not convince the opponents. He delights in adding fuel to fire. He ordered to close down the public granaries and drove many to hunger and starvation. He threatened to kill those who did not visit the brothels. Nothing can be ridiculous than this. He insulted Mereia who exposed his arrogance and poisoned him to death. A tyrant thus forced the dissent voice to die down not realising that his audacity might stoke the fire of revenge. There will be people you cannot win over or be cowed down.

Caligula's court is woven around in structure of power. At the end of the second act, his direct fight with Scipio reveals that he is exhausted and inevitable he may collapse. Caligula embodied the violent spirit of confusion. To criticise him or any of his actions would have been to criticise the divine order. But emperors are fallible and the kingdom suffered greatly for their mistakes. The

talk between Scipio and Caligula reveals the demon trying to challenge the divine order. Scipio is the voice of sanity. He spilled the bean. He put all the blame on Caligula. Helicon too warns him about the plot being hatched against him. He knew that Cherea is the ring leader of the conspiracy. The loyal patrician warned Caligula about the plot of killing him.

Rebel Cherea confronted Caligula. It is a fight to the finish. There cannot be two lions in one forest. In the struggle for supremacy, enemies had entered from all sides. We have seen in the play many innocent victims, falling a prey to the whims of Caligula. Scipio is a reluctant fighter. His son was killed but he had still some soft corner for Caligula. But Cherea is of a different breed. For him, it is better to be impetuous than cautious. Caligula is giving a little party. He expects all loyalists and the rebels to attend. The heartless tyrant says to the executioner: "kill them slowly; his mistress Cesonia announces the plea of sharing on "artistic emotion" with Caligula. The threat is that anyone who has not shared it will be beheaded. It was informed that Caligula is going to die. The patricians were brought in. See the power game at the end of the play. Caligula hosts a party for his friends. He succeeded in creating an illusion of power. His end game is to quickly eliminate the conspirators. His dance party is followed by reciting poems on Death. The scene evokes pathos. Caligula is both the judge and the jury to decide the winner. All the poets recited their poems...chewed the immortal tablets summing up the inscrutable ways of destiny. Caligula realised his lone battle. To add to it, rebel Cherea and poet Scipio were bent on destroying all signs of power.

Caligula was obsessed with Power. His feeling of insecurity and tendency to violence was already there and aggravated after the death of his sister and lover Drusilla. We cited many examples of his insanity and madness. Caligula strangles Cesonia to death, who, shadow-like clinged to him. Caligula's last soliloquy is realisation of his heinous crimes. Scipio, Cherea and others stabbed him. The image of the breaking of the mirror signifies the collapse of the narcissistic power, a romantic symbol remains a distant reality for him.

Two significant books influenced Milan Kundera (i) Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and Denis Diderot's novel, *'Jaques leFataliste'*.

Sterne discovered the immense possibilities for “playfulness” inherent in the novel. Diderot borrowed from Sterne the story of “Jacques being wounded in the knee, taken away in a cart....and cared for by a beautiful woman. (p9).

Jacques and his Master contained a lot of variation, representing multiple encounters between the master and Jacques and Master-Jacques-Madame de la pommeraye. The echo of Master and Servant is also there in Cervantes “Don Quixote” and Samuel Beckett’s “Waiting for Godot”.

Jacques fell in love with Justine but did not reveal it to his Master, which upset him. Providence plays a major role in shaping affairs of love and there is no question of sharing the secret with his boss. The Master’s beloved was Agathe. He compares Justine with Agathe but Jacques ruled out any involvement with Justine. This further infuriated the Master and he showed his power of rebuking and insulting him.

All masters want to appear more brilliant than other people but when the master saw Justine, he longed for her beautiful features to which Jacques snubbed him. Power and authority cannot buy love. Master must maintain a respectable distance from the servant. Here it didn’t happen.

Jacques and Junior Bigree wanted Justine but Bigree was able to get her love. The master has exactly the same problem. The master had an eye on Justine and he could not make Agathe happy. His fluctuating temper and shifting stands on matters of love paid him dearly. Out of disgust, Master says that the parents of the girls are ‘filthy shopkeepers’. Saint Queen and Master, both loved Agathe but finally Saint Queen succeeded in winning her because Master remained non-committal to Agathe for which his friend Saint queen grabbed the proposal. The issue festered and a quarrel between Jacques and the Master. Servant saying, “you have set a bad example”(p24) of not reciprocating Agathe’s love to which the Master was in full fury to cut him down. It was an artless show of passion bordering on vulgarity.

Jacques and Junior Bigree spent the night with Justine and were caught. Master found it out. He scolded, Jacques, ‘traitor ‘ ‘ scoundrel’ because the servant was perceived to have seduced Justine and he was deprived of such amorous activities. Old Bigree ordering his son to attend to business and the master fuming at Jacques are instances of

command situations. Jacques absorbed the abusive language hurled on him by the Master but did not agree that he had sex with Justine.

Parallel themes of love, friendship, betrayal and deception occur very frequently in the play. The conversation between saint Queen and Master play on word power . “I am despicable “ used by Saintqueen which hides the real meaning.(profuse use of ellipses and indirect speech).Saint Queen knows that the other person who pursues the same young woman is nine but the master. The deception in love is exposed. Meanwhile, Justine reveals that Jacques has not touched her in the attic. “There could never be anything between us even if we were alone in a deserted island. Jacques, Young Bigree became friends as usual but Saintqueen and the Master hatched a plot to avenge Justine as she has betrayed both Saintqueen and the Master.

People around us even our closest friend remain mysterious but Jacques reputation remained intact. He defied the poets to whom the master calls, ‘blasphemy’ (p41). Jacques repeated after that ‘it is written on high’ speaks of his humility and surrendering to divinity. He is aware of his Masters weakness towards sex and frivolity.

The Second Act brings in love story of Madame LaPommeraye. With Marquis Jacques intervened to tell his story of love. Love is a weak spot both for the Master and the Marquis. Both are powerless and vulnerable to fair sex. Jacques has studied the chinks in the armour of powerful persons. The moment they become victim to lust , you lose your strongholds and become an ordinary person. One needs to master one’s emotion. The innkeeper, Madam said, ‘it is a great misfortune when one continues to love after the other no longer does’(p47). She could not justify why her love to Marquis wanes.

Marquis fell in love with the younger daughter and fore shook the innkeeper. Mother and daughter thrived on prostitution because of bad luck losing everything in lawsuit. The irrelevant details of the story of Saint Simon and Jacques story of ‘ knife and the sheath’ are devices to give a camouflage of spirituality and Marquis dirty craving for illegitimate sex with the beautiful girl. The daughter wanted to marry Marquis and expects Marquis to forgive her for being a prostitute in the past. But Marquis wants to reject her as soon as his physical enjoyment is over. Jacques consented to marry the beautiful girl.

The master drew parallel between the beautiful girl and Agathe to which Jacques told him that he is mistaken. The master reminded him that he is only the servant and need not cross his limits. Arrogance of power is seen here. But to Jacques a leopard cannot change his colour. He is destined to obey orders. He then changed his mind regarding the girl. World has assigned a role to everybody. Fate is the master; character is a pawn in the wheel. A servant cannot be bold; he is set to be a timid person.

Luck and circumstances always play a role in power. Quick turn of events, upset the Master. He lettered choicest abuses: 'you both seduced your best friends' women ;.(p73). The use of insulting language arose out of Master's desperation. Saint Queens suggestion for revenge (act 3,sc 2) has double meaning.

1-revenge against Agathe

2-revenge against his rival in love, i.e, Master

In the Master's perspective, Lust has taken a malignant form. He enjoyed the remarks of Saint Queen in the attic with Agathe. The Master wanted to have fun sex with Agathe too but he failed to measure up to the conspiracy of his friend, Saint Queen. In the fight between love, revenge, betrayal, deception the only bright spot was Jacques who continued both of them.

Everything came out open in the Arrest scene (act 3 sc 3 p 79). The master was caught red handed. He was to be sent to the prison. His rendezvous with Agathe and Saintqueen's plot for revenge had unfortunate implication. Both the master and SaintQueen fought a bloody battle and the latter succumbed.

The trial scene (act 3 sc 5,pg 85). Jacques was sure to be killed by the invading peasants. Jacques fell in love with a servant girl but in the mean time he was sold to other masters. Jacques joined the military then. The young Bigree married Justine. They were blessed with a child.

Destiny plays a cruel joke. The Master lost Agathe. Jacques' love couldn't be materialised. Jacques had to take care of his illegitimate child.

The play ended with Master's Soliloquy. Realisation dawned on him. Jacques and the Master stripped off their respective loves, flirting, romance are back to circle. They are made for each other and shared each others' agonies and ecstasies. The power centre, controlling human predicament shifted to divine.

Some other domains of Power

The media and the intellectuals are opinion makers. They control the public mind. They serve their masters, the investors and distort information. They forget the ethics of reporting. Behind power, there is disguised ideology. Besides language, power manifests in other areas too. We notice the evidence of power in Advertisement, propaganda, caste conflict, racial fight, spectators' sports. Subtler methods of control are practised in education, judiciary, health care. /in the guise of public interest, popular movements are crushed, though there is an upsurge of counter culture movements and free speech. Rethinking is done in all spheres including spiritual domain.

Conclusion

To summarise, the paper has tried to show how power manifests in texts, conversations. We are suggesting that there are many ideal domains for exploring and better understanding of power equation/relations. Literature is one such which helps to understand the human predicament better.

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