

Braj Ranjan Mani, *Knowledge and Power: A Discourse for Transformation*, (New Delhi, Manohar Publishers, 2014), Rs. 450, Vii+424 pp., Pbk, (ISBN 978-93-5098-065-1).

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Braj Ranjan Mani sets out for a 'Socratic mission' to recognise the 'lacks' in human wisdom and knowledge but also towards an intellectual transformation that 'lacks' the false conceit of it. It is through this immanent critique he attempts a revelation of a world that is more humane and just. It is critique of bourgeoisie power/ knowledge mutuality and its construction of categories of exclusion and subordination. His work signifies an intense engagement with philosophy, history, society, state and market that enables the readers to 'de-hegemonize' the categories of gender, caste, class from within the discourse of marginality. Mani's stated aim in this book drawing on a vast corpus of critical literature is to unsettle bourgeoisie construction of knowledge for a diagnosis of a "world with a million millionaires and a billion hungry people" and to "reinvent humanity" (p.12).

The main emphasis of this book is on the self-deception of the dominant canon of this power/knowledge mutuality. Mani invokes a Gramscian "interregnum" but with a sense of optimism. The 'crisis' as Gramsci calls it but interestingly the author explores as the way new can be born immanently from the old.

The new' for the author can only be brought about by revealing the nexus between the elites in India, media, market and knowledge. Drawing on a historiography of marginality he articulates on how caste became reified throughout the national movements since Nineteenth century that became deeply entrenched in the post-independence era through school curriculum and media representations. This dominant paradigm not only conceals the voices that inherently threaten to subvert it but also validates their own deception. Media a potential social and political force for change and emancipation of the downtrodden, rather accentuated the hierarchies of exploitation, suppression and marginality. Media (corporate media in particular) through its power over the 'metonymic' through visuals and images "encourage people to shut out the world...promoted to overtake people's real freedom and aspire for dehumanising consumer culture" (p.152).

Chapter 1 "Understanding the Fundamentals", underlines the naturalisation of manmade inequalities for centuries. How through different signifiers' inequality is perpetrated in different "epistemes"? Mani's historiography of inequality in this chapter underlines the fundamentals of marginalisation among different groups based on gender and caste.

Chapter 2, "Understanding of the Modernization of Oppressive Tradition", begins with a Locational scrutiny to Hobbesian 'human nature' in the context of India. He writes "in the desert of deception and injustice, Hobbes would also see oases of human love and cooperation" (p.95). Unlike Hobbes' State of Nature for Mani primitive societies were not always in perpetual conflict.

Primitive societies were not always brutal before the emergence of the 'social contract' in the context of India. It is the nexus of the modern state and capitalism signs of brutality emerged. For Mani these primitive societies were appropriated by bourgeoisie greed into the exploitative class structure of power that gradually displaced them from the state of harmony. Expropriation of the indigenes living in harmony with nature by the capitalist greed for natural resources is an example of this state of disharmony in contemporary India that brought subjugation of once harmonious human nature.

Chapter 3, "Understanding the Media, Publicity and Pop Culture", underlines the emergence of a global climate of consumerism through publicity and entertainment. Mani brings out the dark side of democracy and its nexus with market to 'produce' citizen-consumers whereby all the human values are reduced to a commodity of exchange. Mani warns against appropriation of these values by capitalist forces as that leads to oppression and "debasement of inner resources" through a process of internalisation.

Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer viewed pop culture as an instrument of enforcing conformity behind a permissive screen and also as an instrument of social and political control. Mani moves in a similar direction with Adorno and Horkheimer but it would have been interesting to explore the genesis of the problem and the split between them and Walter Benjamin who identifies it as potential site for resistance that can transmit subversive signals.

Chapter 4, "Understanding the Politics of Knowledge", underlines manifestation of knowledge/power nexus in the contemporary societies. Through a 'history of ideas' by engaging with philosophers from Plato to Nietzsche and B.R Ambedkar the author explicates the problem of this nexus. His immanent critique of knowledge resonate a coterie of thinkers since ancient times. The way knowledge claimed as truth, conceal and destroy actual historical evidence. He cites numerous examples from pre-modern through the modern era of these truth claims that in more than one way buried the facts to enact a system of power and domination. He illustrates the classic example of Brahminic system of knowledge from India and social Darwinism ingrained in fascism in Europe.

The author after a detailed analysis of the silence and ignorance trace it to a system of knowledge perpetrated by the bourgeoisie. This hegemonic form of bourgeoisie knowledge as discussed in the previous chapters is maintained through media, culture and religion. The will to free voice and articulation of the people has been constrained by this system of knowledge, language and education. The mind is the site for struggle where a counter to the oppressive system is to be ignited to subvert the oppressive knowledge claims. A form of "emancipatory education" that has a strong legacy in India can perform this role of transformation. And the oppressed themselves have to be part of this struggle. But the politics of self-representation is to be distinguished from narrower versions of identity politics.

Mani's book came at a time of contestations between different and antithetical knowledge systems and political ideologies where 'new' and hegemonic variants of Brahminism are at work in spheres of the private and the public. The book is a thoughtful analysis of potential counter-politics to these different strands of Brahminism-both new and the old.

His detailed analysis with an extended bibliography would familiarise the readers with intellectual works concerning emancipatory transformation of our society. Further, the book is expected to equip the readers to struggle for social justice not in isolation but in dialogue with this difficult terrain of contestations. It would be beneficial to activists and academicians who are part of this 'discourse on transformation'.