Abstract:
This research paper deals with the theoretical aspects of the terms power and power relations. It explores the dimensions to which these concepts have been expanded and explains their diversified nature. Power relations are the relations guided by the power, that is, power is an inherent part of the relationships. No two persons enjoy the same position in the society. They are divided and distinguished on the hierarchical basis. This basis defines the position of the individual in the society and attaches a role to them. Some are given the privilege while others are negated and subjected to follow the commands of the other.

Keywords: Althuser, Foucault, Gramsci, Hegemony, Ideology, Marx, Power, Power Relations
In society, there is a continuous attempt to control and rule over the resources of the society. This attempt is not only confined to controlling and ruling the material resources but it also encompasses the human resources. Power is a significant tool used to achieve this objective. Power is the word which is present in each and every aspect of social, political and economic life. The initial traces of the term power are found in the works of Nicollo Machiavelli (*The Prince*, early 16-th century) and Thomas Hobbes (*Leviathan*, mid 17-th century) (Sadan 33).

Hobbes described power in the positive and encouraging spirit where power is executed by utilising the available means to fulfill the future prospect, to make the future secure. He stated: “the power of a man is his present means, to obtain some future apparent good” (*Leviathan* 73). But power is not an amusing and alluring term. Apathy and cynicism are also the part of it. Power is defined in the *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas* in the following words: “In its most general sense, power refers to the capacity to have an effect”. In the words of Robert C. Soloman and David Sherman, power is “the ability or capacity to compel others to act according to one’s aims so that they will do what they would not otherwise have done. Power can also affect how such actions are performed” (243). Max Weber defines power as “the probability that one actor in a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests” (53). *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* gives an explicit definition of power in the following words:

A by his power over B, successfully achieved an intended result r; he did so by making B do b, which B would not have done but for A’s wishing him to do so; moreover, although B was reluctant, A had a way of overcoming this. (731)

Power is omnipresent and perennial in nature as it is present in different strata of the society. There are many realms through which power is exercised. In general it is held through Gender, Caste, Class, Race, Ethnicity, etc. There are also many institutions that maintain the practice of power such as law, religion, family, education, etc. Power lies in the hands of those who have control over the pivotal things of the society. One having the charge over human, intellectual, material, economical resources of the society is often seen as the possessor of the power. Power is unevenly and unequally distributed in the society. The degree of power possessed by an individual or a group or an institution is always associated with the amount of resources owned by them. Wikipedia has given many sources through which power can be held or exercised:

- Delegated authority (for example in the democratic process)
- Social Class (material wealth can equal power)
- Resource currency (material items such as money, property, food)
Power is the term which is also closely associated with influence and authority. Some define influence and authority as different kinds of power. Influence means the power that one has to make the other person behave in a particular way. A person who adores the other person often works in a way that pleases the other or according to the wishes of that person. In influence there is the absence of domination because the person is performing a particular act without having pressure from the other person. Usually that person is an ideal in the eyes of the followers. For example, a person influenced by a movie star or a certain personality starts following his way of talking, his ideas and views, his dressing style, his hair style, etc. Authority is the word which is “used for power that is perceived as legitimate by the social structure” (“Power(Social and Political)” Wikipedia). Because it is legitimate, it can give orders and directions and the people are bound to follow it. Domination is present in the practice of authority because it is enforced by law; it is legitimate and in order to live peacefully it is followed by people unquestionably.

The main features of power are: coercion, domination and manipulation. Coercion is also considered as the crude form of power. With the exercise of power, one can attain whatever he desires for. The person having power makes the powerless person to perform what is asked from him. Powerless person feels reluctant in fulfilling what is demanded of him because it does not benefit him or it poses a threat to other important things. Physical/psychological/economical harm is made to the person not acting in a way that other wants him to do. Coercion is practiced by using unfair means such as force, threats, harassment,
blackmailing, etc. to obtain and fulfill certain demands. Thus, coercion is the main feature of power where a powerless person is forced to do something by the powerful person.

Domination is another feature of power. In domination one controls or influences the actions of the other. The person has to work according to the wishes of the other because the other one is in a position which is higher than him. Thus, if he does not follow the instructions of the person superior to him, he can face atrocities in the hands of the other. There is a total grip on the person who is being dominated and there is no place for resistance. Max Weber defines domination in the following words: It “is the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons... The existence of domination turns only on the actual presence of one person successfully issuing orders to others; it does not necessarily imply either the existence of an administrative staff or, for that matter, of an organisation” (53).

Manipulation is also a feature of power. To manipulate means to control in a dishonest way so that the person may not realize it, i.e., to have your way without letting the person know about it. Manipulation does not give any chance of resistance. In it various facts are kept hidden from the person on whom power is exercised.

Power is often said to be in a relation because power is not able to function if there is no presence of at least two bodies or entities. In order to exercise power at least two entities should be present, i.e., for the proper functioning of power, two persons or bodies need to be present. One is always the person who practice the power and the other is the one on whom that power is practiced. Thus one is the performing entity and the other is the entity on which power is performed. Encyclopaedia of Philosophy gives five main features of power paradigm:

1. an intention manifest in the exercise of power;
2. the successful achievement of this intention;
3. a relationship between at least two people;
4. the intentional initiation by one of actions by the other; and
5. a conflict of interest or wishes engendering a resistance that the initiator overcomes.

(731)

Power operates at every level. Society is the web of social relationships and these relationships exist in every sphere of the society. Whenever there is an involvement of power, these social relationships take the form of power relations. The power present within relations is unevenly and unequally distributed. Power relations are always present or exist throughout society wherever there is one who has the ability to coerce, dominate, manipulate, intimidate, influence or oblige the life or lives of other. For example: At home: it is present in the relationship
between Parents/Children. At classroom: it is present in the relationship between Teacher/Student. At organisational level: it is present in the relationship between Superior/Subordinate, etc. Or, we can take the example of the power relations present in the social divisions like in the relationships between male/female, master/slave, high class/low class, coloniser/colonised, etc. Thus it is always exercised in hierarchical order. It is not present at the same level. Always the superior, the dominator etc. enjoys the power over inferior, the dominated. Hierarchical order is present in each and every domain of society. In terms of relationships at various levels it is present in parent-children, teacher-students, employer-employee, government-citizen, etc.

Starhawk provides three types of power in her book *Truth or Dare: Encounters with Power, Authority and Mystery*: power-over; power-from-within and power-with. By ‘power-over’ she means ‘domination’ and ‘control’ over other entity. According to her, power “is wielded in the workplace, in the schools, in the courts, in the doctor’s office. It may rule with weapons that are physical or by controlling the resources we need to live: money, food, medical care; or by controlling more subtle resources: information, approval, love” (Starhawk 9).

Power-from-within refers to the power present inside the human beings. It is the realization, recognition and cognizance of the internal forces and utilising these forces to perform what an individual wants to perform. In the words of Starhawk, it is “the power that emerges from within, that is inherent in us as the power to grow is inherent in the seed” (8). She defines it to be centered around ‘personal ability’ and ‘spiritual integrity’.

Power-with is the power “pertaining to social power or influence among equals” (Starhawk 11). Unity and harmony among the participants are the pivotal facets of this type of power. And it is easy to maintain these facets because everyone is at the same position and have common goals. There is no one to lead or to give instructions to. Activities are performed in order to achieve mutual interests.

Power is also believed to be comprised of three forms: Visible power, Hidden power and Invisible power. Visible power is that form of power which is observable and noticeable in nature. Usually visible power comprises power exhibited by political bodies like government bodies, courts etc. The effects of such type of power can be seen in the public domains. The powerful body and powerless body can be easily recognised. For example: a criminal is a powerless body trialed under the law, the powerful body, of a certain land. The students are the powerless body who follow the rules and regulations of the school/college, etc.

Hidden power is that power which involves manipulation of situation in order to get specific results or to stop something from happening. It is practiced by obstructing other’s path.
Powerful people are given privilege by limiting the interests of the powerless. Invisible power is that form of power which fulfils its agendas without being recognised. Here the exercise of power remains unnoticed. The exercise of power can remain invisible either due to the cunningness of the powerful entity or due to gullibility and naivety of the powerless entity.

Now let us discuss various concepts associated with power and its application. Ideology and Hegemony are the most pivotal concepts in this respect. Ideology is the major term associated with Marxism. It can be said that without ideology Marxism is inconceivable. Though the term ideology was coined by French Philosopher Destutt de Tracy, who used the term to refer to the philosophy of mind, the ‘science of ideas’; it is most prominently used in Marxism. In general terms ideology “is a set of beliefs underlying the customs, habits and practices common to a given social group” (Murfin 208). Eric R. Wolf defined ideology as “unified schemes or configurations developed to underwrite or manifest power” (qtd in Stanley R. Barrett, Sean Stokholm and Jeanette Burke 469). Human society comprises of many social groups where the interplay of social relationships is always in the being. Every social group has its own set of beliefs, that is, ideology. Members belonging to the same social group comply with the same ideology. These members hold their ideology to be superior from others. “To members of that group, the beliefs seem obviously true, natural, and even universally applicable. They may seem just as obviously arbitrary, idiosyncratic, and even false to those who adhere to another ideology” (Murfin 208).

In order to understand ideology, we can take the help of the example given by Michael Freedman. He provides the example of a man confronting a large group of people waving banners and shouting slogans to explain how a person perceives the situation with the help of ideology. He says that if the person is an anarchist, then his reaction will be: “Here is a spontaneous expression of popular will, an example of the direct action we need to take in order to wrest the control of the political away from elites that oppress and dictate. Power must be located in the people; governments act in their own interests that are contrary to the people’s will” (Freedman 2). Therefore, the person will refute the necessity of any government and will think that power must be distributed among the people.

If the person is a conservative, he will define such protest as ‘potentially dangerous event’. The person will think that the protestors are doing so because they failed in attaining their individual needs and with the help of violence they aim to attain them. He will describe the act as illegitimate and illegal and will wish for their arrest. And if the person is a liberal, then he will celebrate the event and will think, “Well done! We should be proud of ourselves...
appreciate the importance of dissent,...free speech...”(Freedman 2). Thus how we perceive the situation is the reflection of the ideology that we adhere to. Similarly if we interpret the case of molestation of a girl, people with different ideologies will view the situation in the light of those ideologies. An orthodox person will interpret the situation by emphasizing that it is only the girl’s fault. She would not have gone out alone or at that time or at that place or by wearing those types of clothes are the responses certainly to be expected from an orthodox person. A feminist will interpret the situation by throwing the light on the system. Feminists will talk about the body and the desires. They will emphasize that women are seen as a tool for satisfying one’s bodily needs, etc. They will also focus upon patriarchy and the position of women in the society. In this way: “Every interpretation, each ideology, is one such instance of imposing a pattern – some form of structure or organization – on how we read (or misread), political facts, events, occurrences, actions, on how we see images and hear voices” (Freedman 3).

In Marxism the concept of ideology is most vividly described by Raymond Williams in his book *Marxism and Literature*, by assigning three meanings to it:

1. a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group;
2. a system of illusory beliefs-- false ideas or false consciousness –which can be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge;
3. the general process of the production of meanings and ideas. (55)

Marx and Engels, the main theorists of the Marxist thought were of the view that ideology is mainly governed by the ideas of the ruling class. Class is a set, collection or group containing members regarded as having certain attributes or traits in common. Social class is a class which is formed when “its members achieve class consciousness and solidarity” (“class-conflict” Wikipedia). They write in *The German Ideology*: “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it” (92). Thus it is clear from the definition itself that whosoever is in the possession of the means of production has the possession over the prevailing social order. In other words, whole of the society is grasped by the ideas or views of the ruling class. Hence this definition of ideology is more focused upon the class relationships as ideology is directly associated with class. The dominant class in this way has the privilege over the subordinate class.
Marx and Engels further elaborated the concept of Ideology in their book *The German Ideology* in the following words:

If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-processes as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-processes. (68)

In this definition Marx and Engels refer to the illusory nature of the ideology. “This view – that we see the real world in an inverted but correctable image – emphasizes how ideology masks real relations... it has given rise also to the understanding of ideology as ‘false consciousness’ (Brooker 134). False consciousness is the misconception as well as the misperception of the reality. It is the incapacity of the person to recognize the true nature of reality. The forces guiding the existence and actuality of an individual always seem to be discernible but in reality they are spurious in nature. The person thinks that he is able to recognize his reality and real conditions but forces exhibit themselves in such a way that on one hand they become unrecognizable and on the other hand they have their way out and become successful in imparting and fulfilling their goals and intentions. Ideology exploits the classes in such a way that no one can question it because it has justified itself in the consciousness of the exploited entity. Ian Buchanan explains false consciousness in the following words: “A Marxist concept describing the masking effect of ideology, which cloaks the true conditions of things, thus inhibiting the mobilization of political activism” (160). Thus ideology works in a way that the real relations get disguised and the people are introduced with distorted reality which seems to be real to them. People obliviously start living in the feigned reality. They become unaware of the deceptive nature of their realities and also the ideology that gives birth to these contriving realities.

Having found its initial structure in the works of Marx and Engels, especially in their work *The German Ideology*, ideology forms an intricate part of the works of Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Terry Eagleton, etc.

The most important term associated with ideology is hegemony. Hegemony is the term most prominently associated with the works of the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci. According to Gramsci, hegemony is the predominance of one social class over the other. This predominance is present in such a way that the subordinate class accepts it as natural. Hegemony is used as a tool to expand and maintain the power in the society. In order to rule the society, the ruling class not only indulges in the activities that interests them but to gain the confidence of the subordinate class on which it wants to rule, they also give importance to the issues and demands of the subordinate class. Thus, hegemony is related to the way through
which a ruling class retains itself in power and secures its position in the society. Peter Brooker writes:

For a ruling class to maintain its hegemony position, the institutions hierarchies, ideas and allied social practices that serve its fundamental economic interest must be accepted spontaneously as the natural order of things (120)... and it can be achieved by actively exercising its intellectual, moral and ideological influence in the realm of civil society – a term for the social realm between the economy and state. (119)

Hans Bertens in his book *Literary Theory: The Basics* writes:

With the publication of the writings of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci in the early 1970s a modified concept of ideology became available. Gramsci, writing in the 1930s, is fully aware of the power of ideology, which leads to the “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group”. This consent is “historically caused by the prestige (and the consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.” Although Gramsci’s explanation of the power of ideology is perhaps less forceful than Althuser’s, it has the merit of allowing us to resist what he calls the hegemony- the domination of a set of ruling beliefs and values through consent rather than through coercive power. (88)

Hegemony is therefore a soft form of power, where social and political order is maintained through consent and it is different from ideology in the sense that ideology is maintained through coercion and violence.

Louis Althuser took the concept of ideology to the next level. But before discussing Althuser’s perception of ideology, it is important to focus on the concepts of base and superstructure. Marx and Engels stated that the base and superstructure forms the basic structure of the human society. The base is “the economy, the forces and the relations of production” (Buchanan 44). On the other hand, superstructure comprises of politics, law, philosophy, religion, art, etc., i.e.; culture, institutions, etc. in the broader sense. Peter Brooker defined superstructures as the ‘secondary areas’ that are given birth by the ‘primary economic sphere’ termed as the base (18). Superstructure owes its existence to the base and it is the base only which formulates, defines and shapes the superstructure. By saying so we mean that it is the base which influences the superstructure. But it is also argued that though superstructure is established by the base, it also influences the base. Terry Eagleton in his book *Marxism and Literary Criticism* maintained that, “Engels wants to deny that there is any mechanical, one-to-one correspondence between base and superstructure; elements of the superstructure constantly
react back upon and influence the economic base” (9). Thus the factors giving existence to
something are also influenced by the existence of something they created.

Althusser in his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an
Investigation)” provided the notion that it is important to differentiate between state power and
state apparatuses. He divided state apparatus into Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological
State Apparatus. Repressive State Apparatus contains: ‘the government, the administration, the
army, the police, the courts, the prisons, etc.’ The Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) includes:
‘the religious ISA (the system of the different Churches), the educational ISA (the system of
different public and private ‘schools’), the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA (the
political system, including the different parties), the trade-union ISA, the communication ISA
(press, radio and television, etc.), the Cultural ISA (Literature, the Arts, Sports, etc.)” (Althuser
143). The main distinction behind these concepts is that the Repressive State Apparatus
‘functions by violence’ and the Ideological State Apparatus ‘functions by Ideology’. Althuser
also stated that the Repressive State Apparatus belongs to the public domain whereas the ISA
belongs to the private domain. As the essay progresses, Althuser starts explaining that the
Repressive State Apparatuses not only function ‘massively and predominantly by repression’,
but they also function secondarily by ideology. Similarly, ISA not only functions ‘massively
and predominantly by ideology’, but also function secondarily by repression ‘even if ultimately
but only ultimately, this is much attenuated and concealed, even symbolic’ (145). He gives the
example of the army and the police by stating that they use ideology in order to maintain their
cohesion in the society. In the same way, the religious ISA, the educational ISA, etc. make the
use of violence in the coded form of ‘punishment, expulsion, selection, etc.’ to examine
discipline in the individuals (Althuser 145). Althuser also associates ideology with the class
and states:

The class (or class alliance) in power cannot lay down the law in the ISAs as easily as
it can in the (repressive) State apparatus, not only because the former ruling classes are
able to retain strong positions there for a long time, but also because the resistance of
the exploited classes is able to find means and occasions to express itself there, either
by the utilization of their contradictions, or by conquering combat positions in them in
struggle. (146)

In Althusser’s perspective, “Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to
their real conditions of existence” (36). The use of the word “imaginary” is self-evident that
the ideology towards which Althusser is directing to, is unreal, illusory. Thus, ideology distorts
the “real” conditions of existence.
Michel Foucault holds a totally different notion of power. By refuting the traditional understanding of the concept of power, Foucault deems power to be different. Foucault’s works are mainly concerned with madness, psychiatry, medicine, punishment and sexuality but while emphasising around these concepts, he makes an attempt to define the true nature of power. Foucault states that in his conception power is not “a group of institutions and mechanisms” that regulate and maintain the “subservience of the citizens of a given state” (The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1 92). Power according to him is neither a “mode of subjugation” nor it is “a general system of domination exerted by one group over another” (The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1 92). Sara Mills veraciously asserts Foucault’s notion in the following words:

> Power is often conceptualised as the capacity of powerful agents to realise their will of powerless people and the ability to force them to do things which they do not wish to do. Power is also often seen as a possession – something which is held only by those in power and which those who are powerless try to wrest from their control. Foucault criticizes this view, arguing in The History of Sexuality, Vol. I that power is something which is performed, something more like a strategy than a possession. Power should be seen as a verb rather than a noun, something that does something, rather than something which is or which can be held onto. (34-35)

What Foucault tries to postulate is that rather than finding the answer for the definition of power and its sources one must centre round the facts how power is performed and what are the results of the power. Power should not be held as something that can be possessed by a set of people or by ‘dominant class, state, or sovereign but as a strategy’. Foucault himself defines it in the following words by stating that power:

> Must be analysed as something which circulates...which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. (“Two Lectures” 98)

Foucault sees power to be omnipresent as it is present as well as produced in every sphere of the society. It is ubiquitous because “it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1 93). He says power is something which consists of:
The system of differentiations which permits one to act upon the actions of others: differentiations determined by the law or by traditions of status and privilege; economic differences in the appropriation of riches and goods; shifts in the process of production; linguistic or cultural differences; differences in know-how and competence; and so forth. ("The Subject and Power" 792)

Foucault insists that power is the major force in all relations present in the society. He also propounds that power is a set of relations which are scattered throughout society and it is not located within particular institutions such as the State or the government (Mills 35). He states:

I am not referring to power with a capital P, dominating and imposing its rationality upon the totality of the social body. In fact, there are power relations. They are multiple; they have different forms, they can be in play in family relations, or within an institution or an administration. (qtd. in Mills 35)

Thus Foucault’s power “is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society (The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1 93).

Seen from Foucault’s outlook power is not restrictive or repressive in nature. He defines it to be positive and constructive in nature. In the words of Foucault:

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that is doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produce things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs throughout the whole social body. ("Two Lectures" 153)

The above lines by Foucault throw the light on his Power/Knowledge paradigm. He emphasises that power effects knowledge and as a result knowledge effects power. In his words: ‘it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power’ ("Prison Talk" 52). This affair of affecting each other is a never-ending process. Here it can be noted that these views by Foucault are similar to what Engels emphasised earlier while discussing about base and superstructure, about their influence on each other.

There is a similitude between Ideology, Hegemony and Power. According to Hans Bertens, Foucault’s concept of power “has much in common with Althusser’s ‘Ideology’ and Gramsci’s ‘hegemony’ because it rules by consent...Foucault’s power, just like ‘ideology’ or ‘hegemony’, derives its strength from the fact that we deeply believe what it tells us” (153).
Thus by considering various definitions, notions and explanations about the concept of power, it can be noted that power is a multifarious and the study about it cannot be limited to one aspect only. In the essay “The Idea of Power and the Power of Ideas: A Review Essay”, Stanley R. Barrett, Sean Stokholm and Jeanette Burke quote the ‘four modalities of power’ distinguished by Eric R. Wolf and these modalities help in elucidating power more vividly. These modalities of power are:

1. Power inherent in an individual (Nietzschean view)
2. Power as capacity of ego to impose her or his will on other (Weberian view)
3. Power as control over contexts in which people interact (tactical or organizational power)
4. Structural power: “By this I mean the power manifest in relationships that not only operates within settings and domains but also organises and orchestrates the settings themselves, and that specifies the direction and distribution of energy flows.” (469)
Works Cited


