

**ELEMENTS OF POWER RELATION IN LITERARY WORK: A FOUCAULDIAN ANALYSIS**

**Gartika Rahmasari**

Department of Management, ARS University Bandung

**Iis Kurnia Nurhayati**

Department of Communication Science, Telkom University Bandung

Corresponding author: Gartika Rahmasari, ARS University Bandung

E-mail: [gartika.rahmasari@ars.ac.id](mailto:gartika.rahmasari@ars.ac.id)

Volume 5

Nomor 1

September 2020

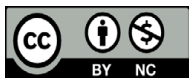
Page 302-308

**Abstract:**

Literary works can be read for pleasure reading because they can be a source of entertainment that contains interesting stories or plots. On the other hand, we can also find interesting situation or condition that happens to the characters in a novel, for example power relation. This study aims to examine the power relationship that occurs between two characters named Gustad Nobel dan Ghulam Mohamed in a novel by Rohinton Mistry entitled *Such a Long Journey* (Mistry, 1991) utilizing power relation theory nu Foucault (2002). This study applies descriptive research method in analyzing the power relation occurred. As a result, the power relation between Gustad Nobel and Ghulam Mohamed occurred in an institution of "partnership", the system of differentiation that can be found is that both of the characters have different interest/goal in maintaining their partnership. As for the type of objectives, Ghulam Mohammed has the ultimate objective toward Gustad Nobel: urging Gustad Nobel to withdraw money that had been deposited in a short time and asked Gustad Nobel to visit Major Bilimoria in prison in New Delhi. In this power relation, Ghulam Mohamed utilizes intimidation as his instrumental mode, by posing a variety of tones in his utterance that he uses to either beg or force.

**Keyword:**

Foucault, Power, Mistry, Power relation



Cite this as: Rahmasari, G. & Nurhayati, K., I. (2020). Elements of Power Relation in Literary Work: A Foucauldian Analysis. *English Journal Literacy Utama*, <https://doi.org/10.33197/ej lutka.vol5.iss2.2020.2655.4585>

**Article History:**

Received: 15 July 2020; Revised: 15 August 2020; Accepted: 25 September 2020

**INTRODUCTION**

Literary works can be read as a source of information or entertainment that we can use for pleasure reading. When we read a novel, we may find interesting plot or characters that can take us to our theater of mind. There are many things can happen between characters of the novel that make the story of the novel becomes more enjoyable to read, for example power relation.

Power relation does not only refer to a relation that occurs in a concrete institution such as governmental system. According to Foucault in the *Subject and Power* (2002), government is not solely referred as a political structure, but refers to an institution that can lead individual or a group of people (Rahmasari, 2016).

In "The Subject and Power", Foucault writes that the application of power is not as simple as the relationship between 'partners' (which refers to the term about the relationship that occurs between two parties) but rather the way a person acts towards the other (Foucault, 2002). Furthermore, Foucault wrote that *[Power] incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; it releases or contrives, makes more probable or less; in the extreme, it constrains or forbids absolutely, but it is always a way of acting upon one or more acting subjects by virtue of their acting by being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions.* (Foucault, 2002, p. 341)

In other words, if understood in general, power is always related to the way a person or one party acts towards one or more people / parties who practice the concept of power by using the values

that are used as the basis for their actions which are also supported by their ability to show their power. The ability to show power can be seen from the way it is used, for example emphasizing the tone of voice when speaking. This is a mode used to exercise power, which will be discussed further in the discussion of instrumental modes in another section in this section.

Furthermore, in relation to the exercise of power, Foucault mentioned freedom as an important element (Foucault, 2002, p. 342). Freedom is a very crucial element in the exercise of power. Power can only be applied to a free subject, or as long as that subject is 'free'. One example is about slavery, which Foucault describes as follows:

*[S]lavery is not a power relationship when a man is in chains, only when he has some possible mobility, even a chance of escape (in this case it is a question of physical relationship of constraint).* (Foucault, 2002).

Power and freedom cannot be confronted head-on. If one person exercises power over another, that power can work if the party subjected to power (object of power) renounces his freedom. It would be difficult to control someone who is still trying to defend his freedom so that he still has the power to act on his own will and is not under the control of others.

Mastery over someone can be done in various ways, one of which is intimidation. Intimidation has no meaning and acts as a pioneer for power if the party being bullied manages to escape. Bullying is successful when the party responds to 'giving up' their freedom; if the object is no longer continuing its efforts to defend the freedom it has.

In "The Subject and Power" (2002), Foucault writes about the points used in analyzing power relations. Some of the points include the forms of institutionalization, the system of differentiations, the types of objectives, and instrumental modes.

In the first point, Foucault writes about the various forms of institutions in which the exercise of power allows. Foucault wrote that: *These [forms of institutionalization]... take the form of an apparatus closed in upon itself, with ... its own regulations, its hierarchical structures that are carefully defined, a relative autonomy in its functioning (such as scholastic or military institutions); they can also form very complex systems endowed with multiple apparatuses, as in the case of the state, whose function is the taking of everything under its wing, to be a global overseer, the principle of regulation and, to a certain extent also, the distributor of all power relations in a given social ensemble.* (Foucault, 2002)

This form of institutionalization indicates the existence of a hierarchical structure which is a sign of differences in position. This difference in position can lead to differences in interests and levels of ownership of power, as can be seen from the position of a president in the state government system that has a higher power to make decisions than the power possessed by a minister.

Furthermore, regarding the system of differentiations, Foucault (2002: 344) writes that this system "permits one to act upon the actions of others: juridical and traditional differences of status or privilege; economic differences in the appropriation of wealth and good, etc. " This system allows the different points of view held by the parties involved in the power relationship which can lead to differences in the interests of each party. This difference in interests can also lead to different reactions of each party in facing actions taken by one party against another.

Another point written by Foucault that is used in analyzing power relations is types of objectives with *maintenance of privileges* as one example. Maintenance of privileges (maintenance of concessions) here can be interpreted as someone's attempt to maintain the power that has been previously owned from the actions of other parties who are considered to threaten their position as the owner of power, for example, parents punish their children who violate the rules set by the parents. as the owner of power in family institutions. This punishment can be seen as an attempt by the parents to maintain their position as the holder of power who has more rights than the child to determine the standard definition of good or bad that the child must follow.

Power relations are a mode of action that does not work directly and immediately against others, different from violent relations that act against the body or matter, which are forcing, destroying or

closing all possibilities. If in a violent relationship there is direct contact with a member of the body of one of the parties who is the object of violence, for example in a direct slap against the face of the party who is the object of violence, then the power relation refers more to the action taken in response to other actions. In other words, a power relation is a reaction carried out by one party to an action taken by another party so as to form an action-reaction process, as written by Foucault (2002: 341) regarding power relations which is "a set of actions upon other actions. "

Efforts to maintain power as an example of the maintenance of privileges can be carried out in a number of ways which involve more or less a process, such as the action-reaction process that I have previously mentioned. This process can be done, either in a short time or in a relatively long period of time.

Then, the last point seen in the analysis of power relations is explained by Foucault by mentioning several examples of instrumental modes used in supporting one's efforts to control others, namely through the use of threats by using weapons, through the effects of speech. speaking), and through the surveillance system. Another example of instrumental modes that are often used in the application of power relations is the use of force. Violence becomes something that allows objects of power to feel stronger intimidation by physical contact made by the more dominant party.

Power relations occur when one party "agrees" (compromises) the situation faced by him and thus loses his freedom. Agreement can occur when the party who is the object of power does not have sufficient capacity to object; a feeling of intimidation that allows the party to feel insecure, a condition that makes it impossible to reject the practice of power in him because he is in a position as a party that is inferior to the power holder.

In "The Subject and Power" (2002), Foucault explains that in every power relationship there is a struggle strategy. The struggle strategy is used by a person in responding to the power directed at him, to defend his freedom. In this strategy, a person who faces the exercise of power devises possible ways of reacting resistance, one of which is in the form of insubordination.

Power relations cannot exist without an attitude of defiance. Disobedience becomes a tool to escape from power relations. With insubordination, the object of power tries to escape the power practice that occurs to it. Resistance is another form of insubordination. Resistance is carried out in any way that is deemed to undermine, or at least reduce the impact of the exercise of power.

Power is oppressive. However, in "Body / Power" (1980), Foucault said that power will become fragile if only suppressed, that "[p]ower would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress, it worked only through the mode of censorship, exclusion, blockade and repression, in the manner of a great superego, exercising itself only in a negative way" (Foucault, 1980, p. 59) (1980: 59).

Furthermore, Foucault argues that power is not only repressive or 'repressive' but also productive. Power produces satisfaction, power generates power, power shapes discourse. In The Foucault Reader, regarding the productivity of power, Foucault wrote that "[power] produces reality, it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production" (1984: 205).

This study aims to examine the power relationship that occurs between two characters named Gustad Nobel dan Ghulam Mohamed in a novel by Rohinton Mistry entitled *Such a Long Journey* (Mistry, 1991). The study will focus on describing the elements that can be found in a power relations based on Foucault's theory of power.

## **METHOD**

This study applies descriptive research method in analyzing the power relation occurred in the novel. The descriptive method is method used for researches that is done by examining situation and identifying attributes of a particular phenomenon, or exploring of correlation between two or more phenomena. (Carrie Williams, 2007). Therefore, descriptive method is a research method that can be used to examine and exploring two or more phenomena, particularly in literary works.

In this research, descriptive method is used to examine the power relation occurred between two characters in the novel, Gustad Nobel and Ghulam Mohamed. The two characters experienced a relation that can be regarded as power relation. The relation was described according to power

relation theory by Michel Foucault, particularly based on the elements that can be used to identify power relation, including forms of institutionalization, the system of differentiations, the types of objectives, dan instrumental modes, as stated in his book *The Subject and Power* (2002)

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The power relation discussed is the power relationship that occurred between Gustad Nobel and Ghulam Mohammed. The main cause of the power relations experienced by Gustad Nobel is related to the problems faced by Jimmy Bilimoria, who is more often called Major by Gustad. Major Bilimoria's request for help from Gustad caused Gustad to run into several problems.

Major Bilimoria who lived next to Gustad Nobel's flat disappeared one day. His departure was related to the problems he was experiencing, which were related to the loss of state funds, which caused him to go into hiding to avoid being pursued by law enforcement agencies. However, at first, this fact was unknown to Gustad Nobel.

Major Bilimoria's unannounced departure left a deep disappointment for Gustad Nobel. This is because Gustad Nobel already considers Major Bilimoria to be more than just a neighbor who has lived together for a long time at the Khodadad Building. More than that, Gustad Nobel already considered Major Bilimoria like a brother. Gustad Nobel's disappointment can be seen from the following excerpt

*The Major's abrupt departure had wounded Gustad Nobel more than he allowed anyone to see. Only [his wife] could sense the depth of his pain. 'To leave like this, after being neighbors for so many years, is a shameful way of behaving. Bloody bad manners. 'He said no more than that on the subject. (Mistry, 1991: 14)*

The above quote indicates that Gustad was so disappointed that he did not want to discuss the issue of Major Bilimoria's departure any further.

Despite his disappointment, Gustad could not refuse Major Bilimoria's request for help which was sent via anonymous letter because Gustad felt indebted to Major Bilimoria who had saved him in an accident that left him with a broken leg several years earlier. At that time, Major Bilimori was the one who escorted and waited for Gustad while he was undergoing treatment. This sense of debt of gratitude made Gustad put Major Bilimoria in a high position and beat his disappointment at Major Bilimoria's unannounced departure so that he wanted to help Major Bilimoria.

In his letter, Major Bilimoria asked Gustad Nobel to help him save 10 lakh rupees or 1 million rupees. Gustad then put it in the form of a deposit with the help of his friend, Dinshawji. Due to the huge amount of money, Major Bilimoria's money could only be deposited in its entirety within a hundred days.

When news about Major Bilimoria came out in the newspapers, another problem occurred. Ghulam Mohammed asked Gustad to return the deposited money within thirty days. This is difficult to do because it can attract the attention of the bankers if more than 10 thousand rupees are withdrawn in one day. Ghulam Mohammed is a friend of Gustad's work in RAW (Research and Analysis Wing) who also feels indebted to Major Bilimoria because Major Bilimoria saved his life twice, one of which was during the war in Kashmir in 1948. On this basis, Ghulam Mohammed will do anything for Major Bilimoria.

In the following dialogue, it can be seen that the processes of mutual domination by Ghulam Mohammed and Gustad Nobel in defending their respective interests.

- 1) "First of all, the money must be sent back."
- 2) "Sure. But I have already deposited a half. You can have the remaining of fifty bundles any time."  
"
- 3) "All of it, Mr Nobel. Withdraw the rest if you have deposited it." **The voice was sharper now.**
- 4) "Do you know how much difficult it is to deposit and withdraw these big amounts? How dangerous? The law is being broken."

5) ***“Better than bones being broken, Mr Nobel. ... Do you know how dangerous it is for Bili Boy? They are using their usual methods to make him say where the money is. The only reason he has not confessed is that he wants no trouble for his friends.”*** (Mistry, 1991: 205, bolded by researcher)

The statement [1] can be seen as Ghulam Mohammed's reaction to learning that Major Bilimoria was detained and could be released if the money he had taken had been returned to the authorities. Ghulam Mohammed wanted to help free Major Bilimoria so he asked Gustad Nobel, the man who had deposited Major Bilimoria's money, part of which had been deposited at his place of work, to immediately withdraw the money. Ghulam Mohammed began to intimidate Gustad Nobel by emphasizing his tone as the narrator wrote in a statement [3] which stated that "[Ghulam Mohammed's] voice was sharper now." In addition, Ghulam Mohammad's statement in a statement [5] which states that "better [the law that is being broken] than bones being broken" increasingly indicates that Ghulam Mohammed will do anything to free Major Bilimoria. This cornered Gustad Nobel because Ghulam Mohammed seemed to ignore Gustad Nobel's efforts to avoid Ghulam Mohammed's request which could pose risks that could threaten his position as an employee at the bank where he worked, as seen in statements [2] and [4].

From the above dialogue, it can be seen from Ghulam Mohammed's efforts to pressure Gustad Nobel to comply with his orders to withdraw all the money that had been deposited. On the other hand, Gustad also tried to defend himself by giving real reasons. Still from the same dialogue, it can also be seen that Ghulam Mohammed tried to control Gustad Nobel by emphasizing his voice so that Gustad Nobel could comply with his request so that Gustad Nobel could immediately return Major Bilimoria's money.

*“Withdraw two, Mr Nobel.” A smile appeared suddenly on his face. “Or I will have to come and robe your bank.” Disappeared just as suddenly. Poison again, in his voice. “I will do whatever is necessary to help Bily Boy. You have thirty days to return the full package.”*

*... “If the money is not delivered on time, things will go badly for all of us, Mr Nobel.”* (Mistry, 1991: 205)

The actions taken by Ghulam Mohammed by applying pressure to his voice can be seen as an example of a power tool used in the application of power as written by Foucault regarding the use of instrumental modes in the application of power, in this case, "power is exercised by the effect of speech" (Foucault , 2002: 344).

The intensity of Ghulam Mohammed's pressure made Gustad "tried to protest again, but the man was hard as steel" (Mistry, 1991: 205) which caused Gustad Nobel to finally lose his freedom to defend himself by refusing Ghulam Mohammed's request to withdraw money in a short time. The withdrawal of money that had been deposited by Gustad Nobel can be seen as the result of Ghulam Mohammed's intimidation regarding the power relations that occurred between the two.

Ghulam Mohammed's success in getting Gustad Nobel to comply with his wishes can be attributed to the fact that Ghulam Mohammed has a more honed ability to deal with stress due to his past spent as a soldier on the battlefield, where he met Major Bilimoria who had saved his life. In addition, Gustad Nobel also knew that Ghulam Mohammed worked as a member of RAW who demanded skills and expertise as a member of a secret agency working on dangerous missions. This advantage can be seen as a phallic manifestation that shows the power that Ghulam Mohammed has.

The variation in the form of pressure Ghulam Mohammed exerted can be seen when he tried to convince Gustad to visit Major who at that time was being held in a prison located in New Delhi.

- 1) ... ***“Please go and see Bili Boy...”***
- 2) ... *“Does it matter whether he sees me? ... He did not care about me, lying, and using me for his purposes.”*
- 3) *“You are wrong, he did care. He made sure you did not get into trouble after he was arrested.”*
- 4) *“But it’s impossible to go to Delhi. My office –“*

5) "Mr Nobel, **please**. ... Three days is all it will take. You leave by train, arrive next morning, and go to the prison. I will arrange for the visit." (Mistry, 1991: 234)

If from the previous dialogue it can be seen that Ghulam Mohammed tried to intimidate Gustad Nobel by putting pressure on his tone of speech and saying threatening words, then from the above dialogue it can be seen that Ghulam Mohammed intimidated Gustad Nobel in a more subtle way into wanting to visit Major Bilimoria in prison in New Delhi. This time, the pressure exerted by Ghulam Mohammed was more of a begging nature, which was strengthened by the use of the word please in statements [1] and [5], instead of coercing as seen in the previous dialogue. In the above dialogue, Gustad seems to have more dominance because he has the power to decide. This power to determine whether Gustad wants to visit Major Bilimoria or not can be seen as a manifestation of the possession of phalus. Finally, Gustad melted down and went to visit Major in New Delhi by using the train ticket Ghulam Mohammed had prepared.

From the two dialogues above, it can be seen that Ghulam Mohammed used different methods in his efforts to suppress Gustad Nobel. Although both use voice stress, it can be seen that in the first dialogue, Ghulam Mohammed uses a strong, coercive voice, and in the second, Ghulam Mohammed uses a softer voice that is pleading. In the end, however, Ghulam Mohammed got the same result: Gustad Nobel was persuaded to do what he asked. The fulfillment of this desire can be seen as an example of the goals (objectives) which Foucault mentioned as one of the points used to analyze power relations. In addition, the two dialogues above can be seen as an action-reaction process as a representation of the characterization of power which was written by Foucault as "a mode of action on action" (2002: 343).

From the explanation above regarding the power relations experienced by Gustad Nobel and Ghulam Mohammed, it can be seen that both parties have the same power to control one party by the other. In other words, ownership of phalus was not dominated by only one party. This allowed for a change of dominance which Ghulam Mohammed at one time carried out and at another by.

## **CONCLUSION**

In *Such a Long Journey* (1991), the power relation discussed is the one that was experienced by Gustad Nobel - Ghulam Mohammed. In a power relationship that occurs, power is not only owned by Ghulam Mohammed, who uses pressure as a means of exercising power, however, it can be seen that Gustad Nobel also has the power that can be used to reject Ghulam Mohammed's request. Although in the end Gustad Nobel agreed to fulfill Ghulam Mohammed's request, it cannot be seen solely that Gustad Nobel surrendered to Ghulam Mohammed, but rather the compromise made to fulfill Jimmy Bilimoria's request conveyed by Ghulam Mohammed.

In his book, *Power* (2002), Foucault writes several elements that can be used in analyzing power relations, including forms of institutionalization, the system of differentiations, the types of objectives, and instrumental modes. The power relation between Gustad Nobel and Ghulam Mohamed occurred in an institution of "partnership", the system of differentiation that can be found is that both of the characters have different interest/goal in maintaining their partnership. As for the type of objectives, Ghulam Mohammed has the ultimate objective toward Gustad Nobel: urging Gustad Nobel to withdraw money that had been deposited in a short time and asked Gustad Nobel to visit Major Bilimoria in prison in New Delhi. In this power relation, Ghulam Mohamed utilizes intimidation as his instrumental mode, by posing a variety of tones in his utterance that he uses to either beg or force.

## **REFERENCES**

- Carrie Williams. (2007). Research Methods. *Journal of Business & Economic Research*, 5(3), 65–72.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Body/Power*. In *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972- 1977*. Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited.
- Foucault, M. (2002). *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984* (Volume 3). Penguin Books.
- Mistry, R. (1991). *Such a Long Journey*. London: Faber and Faber.

Rahmasari, G. (2016). Penyajian Relasi Kekuasaan dalam Novel *A Fine Balance* Karya Rohinton Mistry. *Konferensi Nasional Ilmu Sosial & Teknologi (KNIST)*, 110–115.