

# The Dialectical Relationship between Power, Wealth and Knowledge

During the era of tribalism, which witnessed the emergence of signs of civilization in its primitive form, wealth and knowledge were virtually absent from the life of tribal society; and this enabled the traditional social forces control the sources of influence and power in society. As a result, old age and the wisdom of the past became the major sources of both power and knowledge in Bedouin society. In the absence of wealth and income, which are the bases of social classes, tribal society escaped the division into social classes; as a consequence, members of each tribe enjoyed equal rights, causing exploitation and slavery to play a minor role in the life of tribal societies in general.

In the agricultural era, private ownership of agricultural land and water sources emerged as an institution with legitimacy, giving the powerful tribes and groups that abandoned grazing and became farmers to seize the best agricultural land and monopolized its use. Consequently, the agricultural society was divided into two social classes, one is rich and the other is poor. While the rich class consisted of landowners who owned large farms and estates and slaves, the poor class consisted of small farmers or peasants and agricultural workers and slaves. As the powerful took possession of wealth and slaves to work on their farms, they were able to devote part of their time to think about life and the universe, and to engage in intellectual and cultural activities that enabled them to create and possess some knowledge. With the emergence and entrenchment of social classes, however, the rich were able to exploit the poor, as the powerful were able to enslave the weak. And due to this development, poverty, injustice, need and inequality prevailed in all agricultural societies for many centuries.

On the other hand, the emergence of religion in agricultural society about five thousand years ago as a sacred social and cultural institution enabled religion and its men to become an important force, playing a pivotal role in the life of agricultural society. Religion urged the rich to sympathize with the poor, and asked the strong to help the weak. In addition, religion claimed to know the truth regarding life and the afterlife, which enabled it and its men to influence agricultural cultures, especially the society's customs and traditions and values. This process came through the addition of new beliefs and rituals and rites that accepted the traditional way of life of agricultural society, and recognized the farming of the land as a legitimate activity; and that made it easy for all members of agricultural society to accept religious teachings and follow its men.

But since religious knowledge cannot be proven, all stories about gods and prophets and angels and miracles became claims that may be true and may not be true. But in the absence of

scientific knowledge to contradict religious knowledge, agricultural man was easily convinced to believe and be content; he was enticed by the magic of the religious stories and the peace of mind that religious belief provided. And that enabled the religious institution to acquire a high moral position in society and employ it to acquire wealth and influence to shape the social and cultural life of agricultural society for thousands of years to come.

During the age of industry, which witnessed the development of scientific knowledge and technology and the establishment of good schools and universities, wealth began to shift from the domain of farms and land to the domain of manufacturing plants and financial institutions. In the meantime, knowledge and technology became important tools to improving labor productivity and raising the efficiency of the manufacturing process and causing economies to grow and diversify and expand. In the light of the availability of good schools and universities, wealth became a means to acquiring scientific knowledge by attending the new schools and universities and by traveling around the globe which technology and money facilitated. So, acquiring scientific knowledge became accessible through regular study, practical applications of theories and technologies and human experience. As a consequence religious knowledge was exposed as mere claims that have nothing to do with science or human experience. In the meantime, people with knowledge were able to get good jobs and acquire wealth and prestige and play increasing roles in shaping society and its culture and economy.

Due to this development, the status of religious claims and clerics declined considerably, causing both religious knowledge and religious men to lose a great deal of the social status and social privileges they enjoyed during the agricultural age. Consequently, a large portion of the industrial society lost faith in religion and became more interested in life than in the afterlife; and this led them to become more materialistic and less spiritual. And with the passing of time interest in acquiring more wealth and money became an obsession that undermined the values and ethics of traditional industrial community.

On the other hand, the age of industry witnessed the division of society into three distinct social classes: a rich bourgeois class, a poor working class, and a middle class that was neither wealthy nor poor. This class emerged as a result of the expansion and diversification of the economy, especially in the manufacturing and services fields; services included the financial and commercial and healthcare and education and administrative and services. Although this division led to stabilizing the industrial society, it created a rather difficult balance between the various social classes, because their interests were contradictory and could not be reconciled. Nevertheless, all classes were keen to protect democracy because it gave them the opportunity and the means to pursue their goals and protect their interests. So the balance came through each party's determination to pursue its interests by recognizing and respecting the rights of the two other parties to pursue their own interests as well.

In addition, the industrial society witnessed the institutionalization of the democratic idea and its transformation with the passing of time into a system of government that provided freedom for most people, and a measure of social justice; this measure of social justice came through the elimination of slavery, the undermining of the power of the strong to exploit the weak, and the creation of new and sometimes rewarding jobs. Although these arrangements caused injustice to decline in general, the democratic system failed to establish justice and equality of rights as a fact of life. Nevertheless, the greatest accomplishment of democracy was to transform itself into a sociocultural value or an attitude that caused almost every member of the democratic society to view everyone else as equal who deserves equal social and political and economic rights and privileges.

In the age of knowledge, which is evolving at an astonishing speed before our eyes, we see that wealth has moved from the domain of factories to the domain of knowledge in all its forms. The main components of knowledge in this age are financial and consulting services, information and communications technologies and creative ideas that include many computer applications. In the light of the success of knowledge in assuming the most important position in society, it has become a source of wealth and a means of acquiring power. Because of the pervasive characteristic of knowledge, the new society is no longer a class society in the traditional sense. It has become a society composed of sociocultural groups that have varying levels of education, different cultures and subcultures, multiple interests and hobbies, and diversified national and global affiliations, with a focus on abstract material interests. This has caused a precipitous decline in the importance of religion in the life of the knowledge society in general, and the distancing of knowledge from its human message in particular.

On the other hand, the division of the knowledge society into sociocultural groups based on knowledge and culture, rather than wealth and income, has caused the role of nationality and loyalty to country and people to be vastly diminished. And whereas wealth in previous eras was fixed as farms and land or manufacturing plants, scientific knowledge and financial services and information technology and computer applications are fast changing their faces and moving from one company to another and from one country to another. As wealth and income gaps widened in the new knowledge society, the previous social differences were compounded by educational and cultural differences that caused the spread of cultural ghettos, the prevalence of poverty and ignorance, the decline in belonging to a people and a nation, and the shrinking of the middle class.

As a consequence of these developments, the role of democracy in society as a system of governance and a sociocultural value declined, which caused the foundations of justice and equality in democratic society to be undermined. And this has led to depriving many people of their full political and social and economic rights. So, to restore balance and fairness to society,

the cultural ghettos need to be eliminated by destroying the walls that separate the many groups from one another, and create a new social glue to tie them together. But since the walls that separate cultural ghettos from each other are made of knowledge and cultural barriers, they have become hard to overcome and harder to eliminate. This means that the only way to restore balance and social peace is to develop a new social order that guarantees fairness and justice for all peoples of the world. And this makes the taming of the rich and powerful a must; and facing this difficult challenge a duty.

Returning to the past and the beginning of civilization we discover that power was the means to obtain wealth; and this happened in both the tribal and agricultural times. And while invasion and looting were the means to obtain wealth in the tribal era, confiscating fertile land and water resources was the means to obtain wealth in the agricultural era. However, the ability of agricultural society to produce a surplus of food caused the idea of progress to be born. The wealthy who owned slaves to work in their farms and serve in their homes were able to find the time to think about life and the universe and thus produce some knowledge. And this means that power lead to acquiring wealth, and wealth in turn lead to producing some knowledge. In the knowledge age in which we live today, knowledge has become the major source of acquiring wealth, and wealth has become the major source of acquiring power. This means that the dynamic relationship between power, wealth and knowledge turned society's movement upside down; instead of starting with power to reach knowledge through wealth, progress has made the process start with knowledge and reach power through wealth.

For poor states seeking to develop their economies and societies, they need to adopt new development strategies that start by acquiring knowledge and building the educational and research institutions of society, because such institutions are the means to acquire, produce and disseminate knowledge in society. The age of starting the development process by developing the agricultural sector, raising the productivity of farms and farmers, and building factories and training centers to train workers is gone. India gives a good example of a nation that focused on acquiring knowledge, particularly in the information technologies field and achieved great success. But since knowledge covers all scientific fields and aspects of life in society, India's progress made the development of both the agricultural and industrial sectors easier than before. This means that emphasis on knowledge does not neglect the agricultural or the industrial sector; it in fact makes development a comprehensive societal process that raises the level of traditional interest in both sectors while treating the present and the future as integral parts of a strategic plan.

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