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LANGUAGE IS THE DIRECT MEDIUM OF VOICE CONSCIOUSNESS: AN EXPLORATION THROUGH THE MARGINAL FEMINIST TEXT *BREAST STORIES*

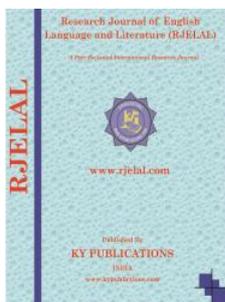
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ABSTRACT

Language or discourse had been the property of the hegemonic Power in the past. The Marginal people were not allowed to voice out as they were the underdogs of the Centre. But in the recent past, the subaltern writers have broken the paradigms prescribed for the silenced or mute sections of the society by bringing back to the Center in the form of the production of the discourse. Subaltern women writers' contribution to literature has brought a tremendous change in the lives of marginal women in the society, as they are keen to awaken their minds and hearts. The marginal characters that they have chosen for their fictions not only representing their colonized life but also their present decolonized state through their self-identity and Voice. The subaltern characters have fully understood their vibrant role which can bring a huge change in the perception of the patriarchal society on Marginal sectors. This research paper attempts to analyze how language acts as a direct medium of voice consciousness in Tribal People's existence with reference to Mahasweta Devi's Breast Stories.

Key words: Marginal's Discourse, Language and Identity, Voice Representation, Voice Consciousness of Tribes.

Language is crucial to all successful discourse, neither develops in isolation nor is born with full growth like Minerva. It undergoes lots of stages and consists lots of things to take its forms. When the explosion of words revealed suddenly, the stages that one undergoes may not be visible or felt by the others. Culture, memory, context create and nourish the language that produces discourse a conversation formal, orderly and usually extended expression of thought on a subject. Discourse a communication either in the form of written or spoken, may begin in the realm of words but is extended to ideas, themes, myths, folk-lore, characters, symbols, images etc. Discourse is the

very instrument to unravel the individual's intentions about anything and everything. The successful discovery, projection, reconstruction of 'the unsaid' is the primary obligation of discourse. Language used in Marginal writings is a wonder to the literary readers as it voices the individual's preserved and endured agony. Mahasweta Devi's perfect discourse has dismantled the notions of the society that expects women to be silent in any irrespective of the situation.

The search of self-hood or voiced state establishes a thematic bonding between the black women and tribal Indian women writers.

Mahasweta Devi's *Dopdi* in *Draupadi*, Jashoda in *Breast Giver* and Gangor in *Behind the Bodice* are the pinnacle of resistant force for the liberty of tribal Indian women. But black women have exercised their democracy through voice and projected as much more revolutionary characters by the women authors. It has taken little long for the Indian women to find out that it is their voice that can actually make them free from all their clutches. Mahasweta Devi's *Dopdi* in *Draupadi* and Gangor in *Behind the Bodice* are the pinnacle of resistant force who represented their voice for the liberty of tribal Indian women.

The reading of the chosen texts of Mahasweta Devi make the readers to assume that the writers are not aimed at speaking for the subaltern women who are caged by their family and society, rather to promote them to handle the art of verbal and non-verbal language which is their voice to represent. For instance in the concluding part of the story *Draupadi*, *Dopdi* vehemently attacks Senanayak who represents himself as the epitome of the hegemonic Centre. The bare language is an evidence for her voice Consciousness that her indomitable spirit. The language Devi has used takes the readers to a visual perception.

Draupadi's black body comes even closer. *Draupadi* shakes with an indomitable laughter that Senanayak simply cannot understand. Her ravaged lips bleed as she begins laughing. *Draupadi* wipes the blood on her palm and says in a voice that is as terrifying, sky splitting, and sharp as her ululation, what's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man?

She looks around and chooses the front of Senanayak's white bush shirt to spit a bloody gob at and says, There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed. I will not let you put my cloth on me. What more can you do? Come on, *Kounter* me—come on, *kounter* me---

Draupadi pushes Senanayak with her two mangled breasts, and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an

unarmed *target*, terribly afraid (*Draupadi* 36-37).

Mahasweta Devi is concerned with the discontinuity and multiplicity of the society and its problems that are aggravated by multicultural differences due to the voiceless existence of their women characters. In her fictional narratives, womanhood is based on seemingly paradoxical sense of shared differences as the very language used by Devi depicting the idea strikingly- a very rough and a transparent, as she is dealing with the problems of tribal women.

The translator Spivak's comments followed by, however, are couched in the jargon of the postcolonial arena which is impenetrable to anyone outside that field. They stand in stark contrast to the simple language used by Devi herself. Spivak writes:

Now *Dopdi* spreads her arms, raises her face to the sky, turns towards the forest, and ululates with the force of her entire being. Once, twice, three times. At the third burst the birds in the trees at the outskirts of the forest awake and flap their wings. The echo of the call travels far (*Draupadi* 34).

A typical paragraph from the accompanying analysis:

Of course, this voice of male authority also fades. Once *Dopdi* enters, in the final section of the story, the postscript area of lunar flux and sexual difference, she is in a place where she will finally act *for* herself in *not* 'acting', in challenging the man to (en) counter her as unrecorded or mis-recorded objective historical monument. The army officer is shown as unable to ask the authoritative ontological question, What is this?

Enough said (*Draupadi* 36).

While explicating the theme, examining the plot and structure and exploring the characters of these writers one can understand that they have been successful in portraying or representing subaltern women in their writing. Being subaltern women the writers could realize their status, roles,

importance, and their paradigm in their society. And they have been trying constantly to break the paradigm advocated to them by the society especially their social location has given them the confidence and capacity to write about the subaltern women.

Devi's writings are all dramatic representations of political realities. Uma Parameswaran writes in the Journal *World Literature Today* about Devi's the language and the targeted audience as, "She re-creates a span of history imbuing her narration with trenchant satire against government and city people and soul-stirring poignancy for the peasants, tribals and students idealists" (457). Her attention is on young intellectuals and naïve, peasant tribal people due to the earlier ones were drawn to the cause because of their idealism and to the later ones that they were the victims of old oppression over so centuries.

Native slang or dialect is a little heavier in *The Breast Stories*. One can speculate on the degree of normalization that had already gone into Devi's standard Bangla to make the words and terms used by tribal people generally intelligible to readers. It is so very tough to translate a culturally rooted works. Because the person who translate such works should have accustomed with the culture of the characters prescribed in the story. Fortunately she has got some reputed Indian translator Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who has known about the culture and tradition of Indian tribals at least from their ancestors if not personally.

The breast, women's wailing, their rape and their witch wood—attributes regarded as essentially female and therefore parts of the discourse of oppression—are used by Mahasweta Devi to contest this very oppression. Using local idiom, fragments of specific contexts, myths and memories of a varied past, she weaves stories and plays with versatility and rigour which encourages the reader-observer to re-situate herself in the unending debates on the text, the reader, dialogic relationship and power matrices. As she emerges out of the spell of Draupadi the readers know that she can never really emerge, that Mahasweta Devi has got under her skin by asking her to interrogate the canon as well as

notions of victimhood, female sexuality and resistance.

Mahasweta Devi has attempted to reveal as mentioned by A.S. Dasan "her ceaseless quest for the identity and dignity of the de-notified tribes of India whose fate is worse than that of the poor of India in general." (77) Spivak's critical introductory remark is very supportive for the novice readers to comprehend and to do dialogic and discursive reading. Multi-perspectival connotations fall on Devi's Breast Stories. The cluster of short fiction goes beyond the author's reading as, "an allegorical some for Mother India", and goes deep in to other fields and dimensions such as: "the subaltern as gendered subject, a subject-position different from the subaltern as class-subject" as rightly pointed out by Spivak (226).

The very submissive and amiable tribal girl Gangor after her terrible rape, speaks boldly as a literate. This is so shocking for a man like Upin and the rest of the male world, who assume women's body as an object. Devi's magical language add strengthen to the change in the attitude of the protagonist of the story *Behind the Bodice*.

Gangor raises the wick and utters her own *running commentary* to herself.

.....Gangor!

You snapped many many times my chest, Sir.

But I knew your plan. Otherwise would you have given so much cash?

Gangor!

Will Gangor unwind her cloth, or just lift it? Do your stuff, twenty rupees. Spend the night, fifty, tell me quick.

You are doing whore work, Gangor?

What's it to you, son of a whore?

You... take off... your blouse...

Gangor breathes hard. Says in a voice ragged with anger, Don't you hear? Constantly playing it, singing it, setting the boys on me... behind the bodice... the bodice... choli ke piche... choli ke....

No Gangor...

You are a bastard too sir... you took photoks

[photos] of my chest, eh? OK...I'll show...
but

I'll take everything from your pocket, a-ll...

In the *silhouette* cast by the hurricane lantern two shadows act violently. Gangor takes off her choli and throws it at Upin. Look, look, look, straw—chaff, rags—look what's there (BB 156-157).

The infiltration of hegemonic male power is also under increasing attack from various contesting quarters and peripheries. Devi is known for "making things possible" through the weapon (language) in her hand. Ajai S. Sekher when he talks about Devi in his work *Writing and Agency: A Minor Critique of Mahasweta Devi's Narration*, mentions "change and transformation have been top priorities in her writing agenda" (63). Specific Socio Political intentions are found in all works of Devi. With her proficient learning, amazing and remarkable memory, profound critical realism and kinetic energy she has inspired and propelled the readers to social activism.

A.S.Dasan throws light on his vision on Devi's Language as:

Her empirical approach to history, myth and legends is enriched by her lively innovative use of language, political irony with reference to contemporary contexts, folk symbolism giving rise to a new consciousness and Bengali tribal idioms pointing to the need for the tribal community to contest dominant cultures and systems (77).

He adds, which is also quoted by Shashwati Talukar, "Language", to Devi, "is a weapon; it's not for shaving your armpits" (77) as she avers.

The language used by the characters are not just their's but Devi's. As a born Adivasi, she knows how to use it effectively. As Susan Chacko points out, the English used in translating these stories is sometimes awkward and starts giving an indication to the reader that are "words and worlds beyond the English translation" (www.parabaas.com). Devi's protagonists are "powerful enough" to move against the tide of

oppression, societal and systemic, in spite of their helplessness. Her writings transcends the boundaries of binary opposites such as self-versus other and domination versus subordination.

The finer details (language) of Devi's narratives via subaltern gender depicted in a mixture of rural, tribal and urban Bengali elevates her stories from the realm of raw and brutal realism to that of art-emotion that seeks redemption as a perennial quest. Suffering consists of anguish and pain. It is a sign of crisis vitiated by forces of vested interests. But experiences of crisis and suffering can provoke the sufferer to rebel and resist. It is time for the exploiters, male chauvinist and elites who seldom see that there is a redemptive value in the suffering of the sufferers, opt to de-learn, re-learn and learn from the subaltern whose name is suffering. (Dopdi- Draupadi, Gangor- Ganagauri).

All the women characters are, in the coinage of a discourse which looks for labels, victims of the system. And yet, the wordless language with which they confront the privileged male is one which challenges conventional modes of dialogue. What happens to women is almost of little consequence—it is the memory of their need to resist in terms where they cannot be matched which endures. In inscribing women's resistance, in what-for lack of a better phrase- one could call a female body language, Mahasweta Devi situates the texts in a continuum with her other works which calls upon the protagonists to question stereotypification.

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