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EXPLORING LANGUAGE AS A MODE OF RESISTANCE IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S *DRAUPADI* AND *DHOULI*

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Abstract

Language is not mere expression but more than an expression. It gives the human the ability to speak or name the thing which is beyond our reach. This paper attempts to portray our language being a powerful tool, becomes a mode of resistance for the voiceless, especially women. The paper focuses on Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* (2018) and *Dhouli* (2002) to highlight how Devi's women retaliate after bearing immense atrocities and seeks the authenticity through their voice. *Draupadi*, a Santhal woman stands for herself after being raped by the police where she refuses to cover her body and speaks for herself. *Dhouli*, a dusad woman seeks to fight for her own identity after she is impregnated and rejected by the man of upper-caste. Incorporating the resistance theory by James C. Scott and trauma theory by Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman the paper reflects on how language of the marginalized women becomes a transparent mode of expressing their sufferings.

Keywords

Language, Marginalized, Subaltern, Silence, Trauma, Resistance, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

"I tried to kill myself. But then I thought, Why should I? You can get married, run a shop, see movies with your wife, and I have to kill myself. Why? Why? Why?" (Devi, 32)

Language is such a medium through which we can make sense of the world. Language aids memory and imagination with which we are able to make sense of both space and time. And therefore, all the steps of perception are completely controlled, guided and driven by language. Language makes us human and hence it is absolutely priceless as passion, and achievement, and as a heritage.

Language is not a mere expression but more than an expression. It is believed that human eyes are the most lucid means of expression, for they age naturally with the body. While most animals use the eyes to express, human beings have chosen another means to express, not the eyes but definitely the voice to communicate. Language as a system keeps on changing. Wittig opines that language is such an instrument that is in no way anti-feminist in its structure but only in its application.

Language plays a very effective role in resisting power of those who are powerful and also portrays how subordinates are refrained from "speaking truth to power". James C. Scott in *Language and the Arts of Resistance* argues that the powerless are often careful in their speech while speaking to powerful. Complains, opinions and responses would be incautious if referred to the powerful are obstructed and such "repressed speech" is redirected to others. On such situations when anger and indignation overcome such sensible discretion a feeling of happiness likely to



follow. From studies of slavery, serfdom, and caste subordination, patriarchal gender relation, colonialism and racism, state socialism and total institution such as jails and prisoner-of-war camps Scott argues that:

Every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a “hidden transcript” that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant. The powerful, for their part, also develop a hidden transcript representing the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed (Scott, 110).

Language can be interpreted in two ways- a submissive language, accepting all the norms of the society and the resisting language, which can be expressed through words, deeds and even silence. Sometimes silence can be the best form of language to resist the atrocities of the powerful people. The term ‘resistance’ is derived from the word ‘resist’ originated from the Latin word ‘resistance’ meaning conveying disapproval or opposition. According to *The Cambridge Dictionary of English*, the term ‘resistance’ is defined as “the act of fighting against something that is attacking you or refusing to accept something”. Words like struggle, power, protest, rebel etc. go hand in hand with the term ‘resistance’. According to Mikael Baaz, et.al. in “Defining and Analyzing Resistance: Possible Entrances to the Study of Subversive Practices”, (2016) he views that like silence, resistance embeds dual nature:

Resistance has often been connected with antisocial attitudes destructiveness, reactionary, revolutionary ideologies, unusual and sudden explosion of violence emotional outbursts. However, resistance also has the potential to be productive, plural and fluid and integrated into everyday social life. Resistance holds the potential to constructively transform societies and change history (Khalili,138).

Resistance is a means of expressing the feelings of protest, rage, pain, torture, humiliation and even silence that accept a particular idea or practice or custom or behavior. A strong disagreement in the voice of the powerless, the have-nots, the marginalized, the subaltern form the voice of resistance. Foucault mentions about resistance in his *Power/Knowledge* (1980) where he opines that resistance comes into effect whenever power regulates action.

The marginalized experiences various levels of domination and has to undergo different sections of resistance. For Dalit women resistance against the prevailing patriarchy can only be fruitful if they can free themselves from the shackles of overburdened life. Moreover, the journey they anticipate from subjugation to resistance requires a logical approach. In this world, women have always been misrepresented. They have always been an embodiment of silence. Silence being the powerful mode of language, often becomes an effective means to express their emotions. It is sometimes more powerful than the spoken or written words. Many complicated ideas have found their expression and decoded its meaning through silence. The French psychoanalyst Andre Greene suggested that “Language is situated between the cry and the silence. Silence often makes heard the cry of psychic pain and behind the cry the call of silence is like comfort” (Cixous, 205).

Language in Mahasweta Devi’s writings reflects her own understanding of the existence of the dominated class and how she reviews the middle-class idea of development and democracy. Mahasweta Devi’s writings often infuse narration with statement. Through her writings she rejects the notion of language as an idea of beauty and tries to reveal the experience and effect of suppression that is commonly found in the social and biological existence of women.



Mahasweta Devi's works not only focus on the intrinsic oppression faced by tribal communities but also a form of literary activism. Devi's usage of literature as a weapon for social change highlights the injustices of the indigenous and marginalized women.

Objectives:

- ✓ To explore how language becomes a powerful medium for the marginalized women to express their pains and sufferings.
- ✓ To analyze how language through translation affects the transparency of resistance and the authenticity of the Dalit and tribal women.

Methodology:

This paper incorporates resistance theory by James C Scott and trauma theory by Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman to highlight how language of the marginalized women becomes a transparent mode of expressing their sufferings.

Discussion:

Mahasweta Devi's stories *Draupadi* (2018) and *Dhouli* (2002) delve into the undeniable truth of women's misery and their power of bearing the atrocities and resistance. Through *Draupadi* and *Dhouli*, Devi reflects on how women's bodies become a puppet of domination and a site of insubordination. *Dopdi* and *Dhouli* presents themselves as a different form of subaltern resistance, grounded in lived experiences and marked by complex response to their socio-cultural conditions. Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* (2018) narrates the tragic life of a Santhal Tribal woman, *Dopdi* who is trapped in the socio-political turmoil of Bengal. Set against the backdrop of Naxalbari movement in 1971, the tribals, landless peasants rose their voice against feudal exploitation. Despite her efforts, *Dopdi* is caught and gang-raped by army officers. The next morning when she is ordered to present before the officer *Senanayak*, instead of submitting herself she arrives naked and unashamed, questioning the oppressors with a body marked by inhuman acts. Devi writes, "Draupadi stands before him, naked. Thigh and pubic hair matted with dry blood. Two breasts, two wounds" (Devi, 33).

Devi presented her *Draupadi* unarmed, that made *Senanayak* falter and stare at her. Her naked body is not a sign of victimhood but a site of resistance as she declares "What's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man?" (Devi, 33).

This very scene is contrasted with the image of *Mahabharat's* *Draupadi* where she seeks the help of Lord Krishna. But Devi's *Draupadi* refuses to bow down and instead challenges the conventional power of patriarchy, "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?" (Devi, 33). Gal in *Language and the Arts of Resistance* (1995) asserts that,

The subordinates do not experience ideological contradictions, a doubled or divided consciousness. It is also not the case that the dominant if given the cultural materials, they find it hard to articulate a counter reality, as hegemony theorists might say. Rather, their hidden ideas about a different world, which Scott is sure they have, just not been realizable in practice (Gal, 411).

Unlike *Draupadi* in *Mahabharat*, *Dopdi* is not presented as a weak or embarrassed object but establishes a new platform of resistance and decolonization that makes her different from the woman of her community. Although her body has been brutally assaulted, her inner strength remains intact. *Dopdi's* rejection to cover her body is a form of retaliation where she insists that



the chief police Senanayak see how his order to rape her had been performed. Through this form of protest and resistance, Dopdi disobeys the values of dominant and patriarchal society which leaves the authority baffled and speechless and transforms her into a superior being. She becomes an object of surprise that the police officer is unable to decode.

Mahasweta Devi's *Dhouli* (2002) highlights women's suffering and how women's body becomes an object of silence. Dhouli, a dusad woman falls in love with Misrilal, an upper-caste Hindu. Her love though pure becomes a sin as she could not express it due to marginalized position. She gets impregnated by Misrilal but does not get any recognition for it. When time comes, Misrilal refuses to take the responsibility of the mother and the child by marrying another woman.

Misrilal did nothing. He didn't even raise his head as he entered the village, leading the baraat. No lamps were lit at Dhouli's house. New clothes, sweets, liquor were freely distributed in the dusad, ganju and dhobi neighborhoods. The village had never seen an ostentatious wedding before (Devi, 23).

Before Misrilal gets married, he addresses himself as Dhouli's 'slave' but when sees society despises them as outcast he rejects her and eventually drives her from the village.

In *Dhouli*, trauma becomes a part of her existence. Her suffering is unending. But what makes Dhouli powerful is that Devi gives her protagonist a voice, even when society tries to threaten her. Though she was deprived of all rights and dignity, she speaks out:

Why did you ruin my life?

I love you...

Thuu! To hell with your love! If you had taken me by force, I could have got an acre of land. But you are not even a man! Your brother's a man! He gave Jhalosons and he also gave her a house and land. What did you do for me? (Devi, 24)

Dalit women have always been portrayed as an embodiment of forgiveness and passivity. So, Devi presents Dhouli as angry, rude and unapologetic. Dhouli's trauma is neither personal nor psychological but caste based or gendered. Dhouli lived a traumatic life where her forced silence shows the deep fractures in a society that is neither acknowledge nor offers a solution for the suppressed members, especially women.

Dhouli's trauma has been layered by betrayal of love, public humiliation, social banishment, the economic displacement, and eventually destroying shattering her dignity. As Dhouli is not allowed to speak, her silence becomes her scream. It is a silence born not of acceptance but of systematic silencing. While Dhouli is not allowed to speak, Devi becomes her mouthpiece through which her testimony is delivered. Devi serves as both archivist and witness, narrating the violence with sharp precision and moral urgency.

When you are kept woman, you're all alone. But now she would be a part of a community. The collective strength of that society was far more powerful than (an) individual's strength. And those who had forced her to be a whore were the ones who controlled the society. They were the most powerful (Devi, 32).

With this Dhouli is not allowed to live a respectable life. She rejects the notion of leading life in someone else's desire. The entire situation throws light on J. Kriesteva's idea of abjection, where

Dhouli shams the idea of being controlled by men. She rejects the social norms and moves on her own will to find her own identity.

Conclusion:

Mahasweta Devi's subtle use of language reflected on the resilience and resistance of marginalized women. Through her writing she portrayed her subaltern figures emphasizing on the intersections of caste, gender class and state violence. Her narrative broke the stereotypical dimension of femininity and nationalism that reveals how patriarchy perpetuates exploitation. Devi centering the silenced voices came to this conclusion that these marginalized women regulate power within a restricted structure. The power is the consequence of continuous suppression and sacrifice which is by exploiting female body. Through their language Devi tried to fulfill the ultimate motive that is to be heard. Their stories are the echoes of the suppressive power of resistance.

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