

Feminism Deliverance From Man-Made Language And Gender : An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the role of language as a patriarchal construct and its impact on gender representation and identity formation. The role of language is a powerful social tool that shapes gender identities and reinforces ideological structures. Language is not a neutral medium of communication, it is a social construct shaped by historical power relations. This research article explores the concept of man-made language and examines how linguistic structures, norms, and expressions have historically reinforced patriarchal dominance. Through a feminist lens, the article analyzes how women and marginalized genders survive, resist, and reconstruct meaning within a linguistic system that often excludes or diminishes them. Article concludes that emancipation from manmade language requires both structural linguistic reform and broader socio-cultural transformation. This article focus on how feminist critics are trying to liberate themselves not simply from gender differences but also from the man made language. Finally, I try to analyze how languages through its varying and telling strategies plays an ideological role in doxifying and constructing gender and there by subordinating the position of women.

KEYWORDS : Pervaded, discrimination, ideological, subordinating, doxifying marginalized.

INTRODUCTION

The age-long prejudices towards women triggered off the feminist rebellion in the late 1960s and the early 1970s in the West and since then critics have tried to (re)examine the issues of sex, gender and language in literary and cultural discourse. The main issues which have become increasingly significant are, to what extent the voices and experiences of women are represented in literature? Can a male writer adequately represent women characters and female experience? If language in general and the institutions of literature in particular are male dominated, then can a woman writer break out of these restrictions to articulate the genuine female consciousness? However, it will not be wise to consider feminist discourse as a 'unified' and 'monolithic' in nature as most feminist writings try to eschew a singular, centralised vision for a more 'plural' and 'decentred' range of approaches. As Toril Moi has pointed out, "to pretend that feminist theory is a univocal body of knowledge would be inaccurate and detrimental to feminism" (1985).

The object of feminism, therefore, is 'fundamentally political-fundamentally political in the sense that the relationship between the sexes refers to "power-structured relationships, arrangement whereby one group of persons is controlled by another" (Millet 1971). Feminists advocate this transformational activity because they believe patriarchal society operates to the advantage of men and serves men's interests above all others. The basic concern in this article is not to examine the oppressive effects of patriarchy which operate in the form of direct coercion such as 'rape', 'molestation', 'wife beating' etc, which is too evident to need any elucidation. I will also show how language-through its varying and telling strategies-plays an ideological role in 'doxifying' and 'constructing' gender and there by subordinating the position of women.

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AIM OF THE ARTICLE

Present article aims to scrutinize how language and gender largely constructed by patriarchal social systems that influenced the perception, positioning and representation of woman in society. The Article look forward to analyze the way in which man-made linguistic structures and gendered discourse come up to stereotyping marginalization and control of feminine recognition. Present article also aims to contribute to broader scholarly discussions on the relationship between language power and gender for reclaiming female identify . It also explore how language functions as a cultural and ideological tool that fortify gender hierarchies.

DISCUSSION

The issues of gender and the place of women in literature are the most important aspects of feminist discourse. The reason for this is that in any society and culture male is regarded as the norm, the central or neutral position from which the female is a departure. As Simone de Beauvoir points out: “Thus humanity is male and man defines women not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. She is defined and differentiated with reference to men and not he with reference to her; she is the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—She is the other.” (1987)

As with the class system, gender differences are also socially and politically constructed though usually presented as natural and normal. That is why feminists have put a great deal of efforts into explaining the differences between ‘Sex’ and ‘Gender’. Ruthven explains the purpose of making this distinction between the two: The purpose of making this distinction has been to free women (but inevitably men too) from sexist stereotyping based on limiting conceptions of their ‘nature’; and the upshot has been a discrediting of essentialist theories of human behavior which designate certain characteristics as male-specific and others as female-specific.(1984)

The distinction between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’, between ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ is clearly a potential site for ‘hegemonical’ and ‘ideological’ debate. How this distinction ‘common sense’ naturalised and normalised by patriarchy and provided an alternative way of seeing relations between the sexes will be examined in subsequent pages. At this stage we are simply concerned with the common and the most popular use of the words ‘Sex’ and ‘Gender’ in feminist discourse. Most feminists see ‘sex’ as a biological category and ‘gender’ as “the cultural meaning attached to sexual identity” (Ruthven 1984). Kate-Millet (1971) quotes: Gender is a term that has psychological or cultural rather thanbiological connotation. If the proper terms for sex are ‘male’ and ‘female’, the corresponding terms for gender are ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’; these latter may be quite independent of (biological) sex.(1971)

Thus Sex is a term which can be used to indicate the biological differences between men and women, but gender signifies the socially constructed differences which operate in most societies and which lead to forms of inequality, oppression and exploitation between the sexes. Similarly both ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ are socially and politically constructed and invested with various qualities, values, images and narratives which constantly circulate in society and which shape and determine people’s attitude to lives. How the patriarchy has been able to ‘doxify’ and ‘construct’ gender and made it appear ‘natural’ or ‘normal’ can be best understood by applying Althusser’s concept of ‘ideology’ (1971) and Gramsci’s familiar notion of ‘hegemony’ (Gramsci 1971). Both Althusser and Gramsci are concerned with marxist theories of class, but their concept of ideology and hegemony can equally be applied to gender, race and various conventions of family life which involve the reproduction of unequal relations as ‘natural’ or ‘normal’. According to Althusser, the terms ‘naturalisation’ and ‘normalisation’ refer to the ways in which we come to think of certain conditions as unquestionably or naturally true. As systems of social regulations and control ideology or what Althusser calls ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’, ISAs, and hegemony are far more effective than direct coercion or what Althusser calls ‘Repressive State Apparatuses’, RSAs, because in the former people willingly participate in their own subordination and the maintenance of the status

quo. Though usually applied to class structure and subjectivity, ISAs are very much bound up with gender.

Althusser holds that consciousness is constructed through ideology, but stresses the ways in which ideologies offer systems of meaning and belief which allow people to construct imaginary relations or conditions in which they live. The patriarchal process of 'naturalization' and 'normalization' of unjust social norms leading to the subjection of women is amply visible in the traditional gender role assigned to them in various conventions of family life. Ruthven says that ideology is manifested in the way we represent ourselves and are represented to one another. For example, 'sexual ideology' determines what is deemed to be socially acceptable behavior for men and women: "The function of an ideology is to justify the status quo and to persuade the powerless that their powerlessness is inevitable" (Ruthven). In accordance with the existing norms of the society women are associated with the children and family and their maintenance which is a very subtle form for the protection and manifestation of sexist ideology.

It is true that only women by virtue of their sex are capable of becoming pregnant and hence their association with motherhood, but it is doubtful that it accounts for the sex-related arrangements in society, especially the responsibility for raising children.

The attack on the 'mothering' and 'motherhood' is of paramount importance for the feminists simply because they deflect attention from what Françoise Basch calls "the cavalry of pregnancy" by making it out that giving birth to a child is always a supremely fulfilling and ennobling experience, despite the fact that even the normally reticent Queen Victoria confessed to feeling "like a cow or a dog at such moments" (Ruthven). As the patriarchy needs sons in order to perpetuate itself, and the principal source of sons is still women, motherhood comes to be construed as the ultimate destiny of essential womanhood.

Kate Millet holds the social circumstances responsible for the specific gender roles assigned to women which tend to divide male and female into two cultures. To quote Millet: Because of our social circumstances, male and female are really two cultural and their life experiences are utterly different—and this is crucial. Implicit in all the gender-identity development which takes place through childhood is the sum total of the parents', the peers', and the culture's notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression. Every moment of the child's life is a clue to how he or she must think and behave to attain or satisfy the demands which gender places upon one (1971).

Traditionally women's lives have been imagined in relation to men's lives, as the daughters, mothers, mistresses, wives of men. They have in consequence been imagined either in terms of a single role psychologically important to men (virgin, temptress, bitch, goddess) or in terms of their single social and biological function in male society (preparing for marriage or married) (Quoted in Ruthven).

The image of women "as angel in the house" is the creation of patriarchy and killing that angel in the house is part of the occupation of the women writers (Woolf 1966), as such epithet is often exploitative of her. Penny Boumelha defines ideology as "a complex system of representation by which people are inserted an individual subjects into the social formations" (Quoted in Ruthven). We have already seen how patriarchy can be seen as an "ideology" in Althusserian sense, experienced in the forms of what Gramsci calls "hegemony". Raymond Williams sees ideology and hegemony as "a situation of the whole process of living" which is distinct from the traditional sense of ideology which tends to view it as something identifiable, in rather narrow and formal terms. To quote Williams:

...a lived systems of meaning and values—constitutive and constituting—which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives. It is, that is to say, in the strongest sense a 'culture', but culture which has to be seen as the lived dominance of particular classes (1977)."

Apart from engaging itself with the dominant discourse of sex and gender, the feminist discourse is conspicuous for generating language of its own, a practice that is exclusively masculine. Language, thus, is duplicitous medium, and that each of us—whatever our sex—is trapped inside the language we speak, but “women are doubly disadvantaged in being prisoners of the male prisoners in the prison-house of language” (Ruthven). Virginia Woolf’s distinction between “male” and “female” sentences anticipated ideological role of language developed and theorized by Dale Spender in *Man Made Language* (1980):

The semantic rule which has been responsible for the manifestation of sexism in the language can be simply stated: there are two fundamental categories ‘male’ and ‘minus male’. To be linked with male is to be linked to a range of meanings which are positive and good: to be linked to minus male is to be linked to the absence of those qualities. The semantic structure of the English language reveals a great deal about what it means to be female in a patriarchal order ... (1980). In feminist discourse the patriarchal mode of representation is known as ‘phallogocentric’, partly because in “most systems of sexual differentiation the phallus is taken to be the principal signifier of the male, and partly because of the special significance attached to it in psychoanalytic theory” (Ruthven).

Elaine Showalter claims that the masculine language that a woman acquires and has been acquiring since time immemorial is both alien and alienating to her as in language one can see the privileging of the male position and the establishment of a patriarchal order. Dale Spender argues that knowledge does not exist independently from people, waiting for brilliant men to discover it and to make impartial records uncolored by their own opinions and beliefs, but that it is constructed in accordance with the values and beliefs with which they begin (1982). Constructing a female framework by deconstructing the man-made language is one of the most important goals of feminist critics or readers. Showalter has coined the term ‘gynocritics’ for “scholarship concerned with woman as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres, and structure of literature by women” (1982).

In feminist discourse writing is a liberating process and it liberates from what Adrienne Rich calls “oppressor’s language”. Monique Wittig records the woman writer’s predicament and her ceaseless efforts in grappling with the man-made language:

The women say the language you speak poisons your glottis, tongue, lips. They say the language you speak is made of signs that rightly speaking designate what men have appropriated (Quoted in Kuchedkar 1987).

The masculine language which is singular and unified and strives for correct and definitive meaning has been eschewed by feminists on various grounds. They prefer plurality of meaning and decentred range of approaches which their discourse seem to embody. Bakhtin has established that language by its very nature is “dialogic”, a two-way or multiple process rather than as a unitary phenomenon. Bakhtin’s overall view of language is as a field of struggle between what he calls the “centripetal” or “monologic” forces which strive to impose a singular, fixed meaning and the “centrifugal” or dialogic forces which contest or fragment the singular into plural or multiple meanings. According to Bakhtin, we find throughout the western history attempts to unity and centralise “the verbal-ideological world”, but:

Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward (Bakhtin, 1989).

Feminists’ concern for a language of their own is an attempt to ‘deconstruct’ the forms of language of phallogocentrism as well as the forms of knowledge which according to Derrida, are “structured around a centre”, that is phallogocentric or patriarchal modes of representation. Derrida argued in *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourses of the Human Sciences* (1966) that in Western Science and Philosophy forms of knowledge are structured around a ‘centre’ and that this structuring process does not normally draw attention to itself: it has become naturalized. Discourse or knowledge refers to a centre, to a point of presence, a fixed origin (1978).

CONCLUSION

The article emphasizes that surviving with gendered language is merely adoptive but transformative positioning feminism as a critical force in reshaping linguistic consciousness. Feminist's concern for a language of their own is an attempt to deconstruct the forms of language of phallogocentrism as well as the forms of knowledge. Feminism's engagement with languages exposes the deep rooted inequality embedded in everyday communication. Languages shaped by patriarchal power have historically limited women's representation and expression. Survival within such a system requires resistance, adaptation and creative reimagining. The article emphasizes that surviving with gendered language is merely adaptation but transformative positioning feminism as a critical force in reshaping Linguistic consciousness. Ultimately, feminist approaches to languages do not seek mere inclusion within existing structures but aim to transform language into a tool to equity, representation and liberation.

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