

Post-structural Feminist Reading of the Select Plays of Poile Sengupta

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Abstract

Post-structural feminism scrutinizes power centres that generate power and invests unevenly in men, tradition, society and institutions. Power is relational as it exists in contextual interactions. Discourse and language reflect the peculiar nature of power that exerts on women and children in the name of norms, standard, tradition and uniformity. But each moment is important as it moulds the action and reactions of women. Languages emerging from those important moments enable readers deconstruct such language to understand the desire to resist hegemonic dominance.

KEYWORDS: Post-structuralism, Feminism, Discourse, Language and Deconstruction.

Post-structural Feminism postulates that power is always related to persons who interact with each other in any context in the society including family and institutions. In Sengupta's play *Mangalam*, Dorai who heads the family as the husband of the eponymous character Mangalam weilds power and boasts himself as a man enjoying enormous amount of it. Mangalam lives at the mercy of her husband. Here the binary opposites as husband and wife in the case of Mangalam and Dorai are starkly conspicuous. Hence Dorai as a selfish man makes the differentiation among the partners rendering the wife weak and helpless compared to the husband. Foucault calls this type of opposition as "the power of men over women, of parents over children, of psychiatry over the mentally ill, of medicine over the population, of administration over the ways people live" (780).

Interactions and their related discourses in the context of both social and institutional ambiances reflect indirect control of organizations. There, the discourses are replete with the restrictive forces of the institutions and societies and they become regulated and controlled. Such discourses display inequalities among genders and hence many feminists support the idea of scrutinizing them. It further projects the complex nature of power and the experiential realities of women as result of social and institutional interferences, and interest in the construction of power and gender inequality. The relationship between Iyer and Sarala in *Keats Was A Tuber* does not mature into a marriage as the woman feels diffident in revealing her love for Iyer. Tradition also forbids a woman like Sarala to initiate her revelation of love to him. Further, the institutional ambience also prevents her from letting out her mind to him. In such a context the so-called privileged Iyer could have come forward to acknowledge the love and also arrange their marriage. In every respect Sarala has been at disadvantage

because of the regulated and controlled atmosphere and communication. But as a contrast, the marriage between Raghu and Damini materializes very easily without resistance and restriction from the institution or parents. Hence Dennis' interrogation, "You seem confident of getting the official sanction" (210) very well reveals the tone and tenor of the regulated or controlled discourse of society or family or any social institutions. The function of power, victimization, violence and feminine resistance are not uniform or similar in all contexts. Here Mrs Dennis' story of resistance to her husband's masculine violence is different. She suffers and struggles for years under her husband's drunken behaviour. When she finds her husband's habits irredeemable she quits his home and starts living an independent life in her parent's home. This shows another facet of feminism and its resistance to male chauvinism.

Discourse plays an important role in the theory of Feminism. It generates meaning through the web of power and its relations. There is always a link between personal experiences and social, institutional discourses. It also combines post-structuralism and feminism together. According to Weedon,

The meaning of experience is perhaps the most critical site of political struggle over meaning since it involves personal, psychic and emotional investments on the part of the individual. It plays an important role in determining the individual's role as social agent (79).

Both Weedon and Foucault consider power as embedded in relations. It casts its sway over discourses and the subjects that the discourses forge and create. Power exerts its effect into the discourses and control and constitute the individual subjects. Feministic discourses focus on voices, experiences and language expressing importance of situations. The following passage from the drama *Alipha* explains the significance of discourse:

WOMAN. Dear Asma ... I am writing this in a great hurry so that it can catch the afternoon post. What you read in the papers is true. Devi is dead ... the factory is closed. All the women's groups in the district have come together ... they are demonstrating outside the police station ... in front of the district magistrate's office ... the trade union office ... the town is paralysed ... I am trying to get a good lawyer to represent us. But nobody here will go against the trade union ... the police are refusing to look for Babu. Red gooseberry eyes had the impudence to allow us to search for him in his house. Of course Babu wasn't there. I am now getting ready to go to the women's group in the city. I have to get support. I have to. Pray for me, Asma ... to the God who sees everything. Bye, my love. (239-240)

Language and its meaning are very decisive in feminist post-structuralism. The entire theory rests on this factor. The writer reports what she/he perceives as an important

part of communication to fulfill the growth of the story line. The experiences couched in language relate a particular important moment which need not be universally applicable but different and unique according to the cultural configurations. Here in *Samara's Song* Thandwai's address to the people after the death of her husband king is only rituals not remorseful wailing of a bereaved queen:

THANDWAI. Beloved people of Eos. Six months ago
this day, your great leader and father and
my dearly loved husband was removed
from us, ... Remember him, people of Eos,
remember him, pray for him, for the easy
resting of his soul. (*Elegiac music.*) Beloved
people of Eos. Six months ago this day.
(*Fades off gradually.*) (290-291)

Subjectivity and agency are also important factors. All women can think, act, criticize, retrospect and reflect. They can change and alter their actions not according to any norms but to the demand of particular moments and contexts. Thus they change their subjectivity or self according to situations. It is not decided earlier but created according to the social contexts. The latest understanding of the context and her reactions need to be approached by way of deconstruction. In *Samara's Song*, Sabah's killing of her mother and usurping the rule of the country substantiate the contextual compulsion of her deed. Deyeth exclaims, "Thandwai is dead. Her daughter poisoned her" (347). Most of the important features of post-structural feminism such as power, controlled communications, feminine clamour for equality, discourse, language, power, self, subjectivity and agency are strategically employed along with the story lines of the dramas to uphold feminine liberty and equality.

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