



## MARGINALIZATION IN PINTER'S MOUNTAIN LANGUAGE

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### Abstract

*Pinter's play, Mountain Language, a short play, is about the abuse of human rights of the minorities by the State agents. This minority, a mountain people, have been reduced to non-entity with no dignity, whatsoever, to their life. Their different language has rendered them as the Other, and therefore, made them vulnerable to the inhuman stereotypes.*

**Keywords:** Discursivity, Dramatized, Marginalizing, Othering.



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### Language and marginalization

Pinter recognizes the necessity of language to live a meaningful life. With the discursivity of language, one constructs one's world, and gives meaning to it. One can resist Othering or reclaim one's position in society by virtue of the discursive nature of language. As such, discursivity is an instrument enabling one to live a meaningful and dignified existence. If this life-giving instrument is forbidden by the State, the emotional bonds among kins would be without any conduit to be expressed. They would be alienated not only from their dear ones but also from themselves.

Pinter, in his plays, explores whether there is a space for the subject outside the dominant order. His exposition on Othering has a method. Raby explains on this: What is dramatized is not the physical torture, murder and rape so frequently referred to in critical discussion, but the process of self-justification they promote and the differing consequences for the oppressors and the oppressed of their limited persuasiveness (10). The relatives of the prisoners, all women, waiting outside the prison wall to meet the prisoners are subject to severe indignities by the officer, sergeant, soldier and the guards. They have been kept waiting there

in the snow. The sergeant's men frightened those women with the Dobermann pinchers. One of the dogs have bitten an elderly women's hand. She has the torn bleeding hand with the thumb going to come off. It is revealed to the audience that all these women, including the wounded elderly woman, had been waiting there in the snow for agonizing eight hours. Their existence is irrelevant for the prison authorities. They are "shithouses" for them: Your husbands, your sons, your fathers, these men you have been waiting to see, are shithouses. They are the enemies of the state. They are shithouses (Pinter 255). Pinter's plays reflect his anger at politics that treats human beings as political abstraction, removing them from the world of feeling and thought. The "ceaseless questions" to the mountain people in the abusive and "the stultifying language of bureaucracy" reduce them to nonexistence (Billington 397). They, being the marginalized group, need not be cared even when at the verge of death. Life or death of such people is of no worth to the State's military. The suffering women, while facing the ritual of humiliating questioning, have to hear:

OFFICER. Now hear this. You are mountain people. You hear me? Your language is dead. It is forbidden. It is not permitted to speak your language in this place. You cannot speak your language to your men. It is not permitted. Do you understand? You may not speak it. It is outlawed. You may only speak the language of the capital. This is the only language permitted in this place. You will be badly punished if you attempt to speak your mountain language in this place. This is a military decree.  
. . . Your language no longer exists. Any questions? (Pinter 256)

Prejudice against the mountain people due to their otherness, is irrational. It is socio-psychological and political in nature. The modes of Othering due to the prejudices differ with people and places, with the local situation. Pinter's dramatization of the othering incidents are localized ones. However, the interrelationships between the Othered and the Othering agencies in Pinter's plays can be viewed in a larger sociopolitical context rather than restricted to the literal, isolated and limited context of the interrelationships in the plays.

Pinter, in this play, employs a technique wherein he supplements the "voices over" in half dark lights with the atrocities the mountain people suffer. It seems that the voice over has the continual undertone of violence that is being perpetrated on them. The guard, angry and bemused at the same time at the reply of the prisoner – that he has, like the guard, a wife and three kids (260) – will invariably punish the prisoner for this temerity. He telephones the sergeant. The actual violence is not dramatized. But its operation is apposed with the voice

overs which make the scene full of pathos. The guard's ringing up to the sergeant is followed by the voice over:

ELDERLY WOMAN'S VOICE. The baby is waiting for you.

PRISONER'S VOICE. Your hand has been bitten.

ELDERLY WOMAN'S VOICE. They are all waiting for you.

PRISONER'S VOICE. They have bitten my mother's hand.

ELDERLY WOMAN'S VOICE. When you come home there will be such a welcome for you. Everyone is waiting for you. They're all waiting for you. They are all waiting to see you. *Lights up. The SERGEANT comes in.*

SERGEANT. What joker? *Blackout.* (261)

Pinter depicts the governmental cruelty on the basis of his observation of oppression of the others. He struggles to find a right form of expression of his political feelings given the pervasiveness of the oppression he perceives around him. Billington observes: In Pinter's case, it seems to me that he has been consistently successful in creating dramatic images and situations that jolt our moral complacency and moral blindness (289). The consequence of the governmental decree that prohibits the mountain language can be gauged by understanding its impact on the psyche of the people at the receiving end. Invariably they are the marginalized others vulnerable to such policies of the State. Pinter dramatizes the impact in a manner which otherwise would not have been so acute. His characters are the poor faceless people. The scene is laid in a prison where a mother, an elderly woman, has come to meet his son, a prisoner. However, the language which constructs and defines a person is suddenly snatched away from them by a government decree. There mountain language has been prohibited till further notice. These mother and son, who are the mountain people, cannot relate to each other, now. Although close, face to face, a dumb, emotionless chasm exists between them, a chasm inflicted by the bureaucratic machinery which they cannot overcome. It is a moment of hopelessness for them. Pinter shows how the whimsy of bureaucratic rules takes life of the simple artless folks. Pinter doesn't tell us why the government has changed the rules. But he illustrates and explains how this caprice of the state kills the elderly woman. While she was allowed to meet her son, the prisoner, she was vulnerable to be attacked by the prison dogs. The guards not only let the Dobermann pinchers frighten her, but one also even bit the elderly women's hand. Now when she is before her son in the prison, the decree forbidding the mountain language does not allow her to speak to her son. The bureaucratic coercion that has rendered the woman literally speechless, thereby having to wait without certainty of allowance to talk in her own language

with her son; and the wound she had suffered due to the dog bite, become too heavy a burden on her person. She succumbs. She is killed by the system. She will not talk to her son, now:

GUARD. Oh, I forgot to tell you. They've changed the rules. She can speak in own language. Until further notice.

PRISONER. She can speak?

GUARD. Yes. Until further notice. New rules.

*Pause.*

PRISONER. Mother, you can speak?

*Pause.*

Mother, I'm speaking to you. You see? We can speak. You can speak to me in our own language.

*She is still.*

You can speak.

...

*She does not respond. She is still.*

*The prisoner's trembling grows. He falls from the chair on to his knees, begins to gasp and shake violently.*

*The Sergeant walks into the room and studies the Prisoner shaking on the floor.*

SERGEANT ( To Guard). Look at this. You go out of your way to give them helping hand and they fuck it up (267).

## **Conclusion**

The prohibition of mother tongue has inflicted upon the mountain people a meaningless life as they cannot communicate with each other. The discursive nature of Language that could have given meaning to their existence has been rendered ineffective in the absence of their own tongue. The very discourse of the State powerfully marginalizing a people by snatching from them their own tongue can have horrible consequences. It has the potential even to kill the people. The prisoner and his mother have been killed by the discourse of the State. And since this discourse has the State sanction, its instrumentality in killing Others is legitimate in the eyes of the State agents, here, the guard and the sergeant.

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