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Language as a Tool for Political Suppression in Harold Pinter's *Mountain Language*

Abstract

Mountain Language is short play that lasts only for 20 minutes.it can be certainly can be considered a political play that carries a strong message against all form of brutality endorsed by totalitarian governments. Mountain Language (1988) was inspired by true to life events that happened in Turkey against minority Kurdish people. Like many of other plays here also Pinter shows his ability to present language with an astonishing effect on the characters life and incidents.

This paper aims to demonstrate how Turkish government was able to demonetize Kurdish language by the means of governmental authoritative powers. Play shows Kurdish people as a culturally rich people who always refused to submit themselves to any forms of terror and violence. Here Pinter's faithfully depicts sufferings and pains experienced by Kurdish people who were not ready to adapt themselves to main stream culture and language of their country

Keywords: Language and Politics, Totalitarian Governments, Cultural dominance

Harold Pinter (1930-2009) is one of the pioneers of the British Drama. Pinter's plays are well-known from all other by their sense of confusion, nervousness, and absurdity. His plays focus on power strategies to demonstrate the human struggle in society. Pinter has popularised the Theatre of Absurd and the "angry young men" plays of working-class social realism to bring English theatre into a new level. Pinter is great man on the world stage of Absurd Theatre. His major themes of his play include interpersonal power struggles, failed attempts at communication, psychological cruelty, antagonistic relationships and the nature of memory. His great work of *The Birthday Party* (Pinter, 1957) is called a great masterpiece as well as a great masterpiece of meaningless significance. In his some of the plays called as political plays such as *One for the Road* (Pinter, 1984), *The New World Order* (Pinter, 1991), *Party Time* (Pinter, 1991) and *Ashes to Ashes* (Pinter, 1996) are concerned with government abuse and for the most part torture. Pinter's later plays that deals with politics are *Mountain Language*(1988) and *Ashes to Ashes* comes close to his earlier work in terms of artistic depth and cultural issues.

Mountain Language(1988) is short play that lasts only for 20 minutes.it can be certainly can be considered a political play that carries a strong message against all form of brutality endorsed by totalitarian governments. *Mountain Language* (1988) was inspired by true to life events that happened in Turkey against minority Kurdish people. Like many of other plays here also Pinter shows his ability to present language with an astonishing effect on the characters life and incidents. In Pinter's play *Mountain Language*, the symbol of authority forms the central theme and language plays a vital role in bringing out the theme throughout the play.

Pinter's visit to Turkey in 1985 inspired him to write the play. He saw the inhuman suppression of the Kurds there . However , the play is not only about the Kurds as a minority in Turkey ; it has a wider scope as Harold Pinter explains :

‘From my point of view , the play is about suppression of language and the loss of freedom of expression . I feel,therefore , it is as relevant in England as it is in Turkey . A number of Kurds have said that the play touches them and their lives . But I believe it also reflects what's happening in England today _ the suppression of ideas , speech and thought.’(Gussow)

Mountain Language (1988) was inspired by the prosecution of of the Kurds in Turkey, it is written to have a global appeal. Kurdish people is considered as a minority in Turkey because they were having completely different culture and religion than rest of Turkey. Here Pinter shows how wonderful people are Kurds who . Their dignity and their courage and their will and their refusal to submit to terror are remarkable. They were a sect of people who have their own extremely distinguished culture and traditions and the people believe they will prevail. They have to, but they must be given our total support. Located in an unspecified location like that of a prison of a capital, where speaking the mountain language is forbidden, this twenty minute play shows two kinds of resistance to a barbaric politicization of language through the two female central characters shows two kinds of resistance to a barbaric politicization of language through the two female central characters. The Elderly woman who comes to visit her convicted son and keeps getting abused for using mountain language inside decree not to speak her own language when at a later date the guard says that there is a change in the rules whereby she is now allowed to speak her own language.

Mountain Language begins with a question. The Sergeant asks the name of the Elderly Woman. This question is barely reasonable and absurd for the first time. It sounds unreasonable when the Sergeant repeats the same question continuously to the young woman’s responses, “We have given our name”. But the Sergeant couldn’t get the proper information as he is new to the language spoken by the women. The primary function of language in this play is power and struggle. The Sergeant plays the symbol of power. Before

the Elderly woman opened the mouth, the young woman answered the question. Here, the Elderly woman plays the symbol of the suppressed and the young woman plays the symbol of the protest. The significance of the parts of the young woman discourse is derived from the context in which they are spoken. The young woman's discourse is not independent of any inherent characteristics of reality; she protests the sergeant and it creates the reality of the play. The Elderly woman is continuous this discourse with minimal initial help from the young woman. The young woman is involved in the elderly woman discourse, and this becomes the reality of the situation. Thus two characters have brought about; there is no relationship through the use of discourse. The Young woman is helping the elderly woman. She entered the prison wall; the Doberman pinscher bites her hand.

The four scenes are portrayals of torture and humiliation. When the play opens, a line of women, who have been waiting in the snow for eight hours to see their imprisoned men, is seen. she is bleeding and her thumb is about to come off. Though she suffers, the Officer neglects her and tries to know the dog/man that has bitten her without taking permission and has broken the rules. In another case, The Sergeant and Officer abuse the Young Woman whose husband has been arrested because he was mistakenly considered a mountain man. They abuse her verbally and physically; they circle her, touch her bottom and ask what language she speaks with her "arse" (p 10). Another example is the Young Woman's husband who has been tortured to death though he is not from the mountain. The situation may continue incessantly. These are just a few examples of the brutal act of the animalised human .

Officer prohibits elderly women in speaking in her language In a threatening tone , typical of the political authority , the Officer addresses the women
 Now hear this . You are mountain people . You hear me ? Your language is dead . It is forbidden . It is not permitted to speak your mountain 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 . That 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 . It is the law . Your language is forbidden . It is dead. No one is allowed to speak your language . Your language no longer exists . Any questions ? (p.255-6)

When the Officer asks if the women, waiting to see their imprisoned men, have any complaints, the Young Woman answers, “She’s [the Elderly woman] been bitten.” (p 6). When the play opens, the Elderly Woman is discovered cradling her bitten hand. The image usually associated with “biting” is that of an animal. Accordingly, readers expect that an animal has bitten her. However, the Young Woman’s answer, “a Dobermann pinscher” (p 6), confuses readers more. This is because the name that she provides in answering who is the name of a dog, not that of a human being. This answer does not satisfy the Officer because he wants to know exactly which (or who) among the Dobermann pinschers has bitten the Elderly Woman. Officer got no answer from them. . As the Officer does not get an answer, he explains to the women: Every dog has a name! They answer to their name. They are given a name by their parents and that is their name that is their name! Before they bite, they state their name. It’s a formal procedure. They state their name and then they bite. What was his name? If you tell me one of our dogs bit this woman without giving his name I will have that dog shot! (p.8)

Another example is the Young Woman’s husband who has been tortured to death though he is not from the mountain. The situation may continue incessantly. These are just a few examples of the brutal act of the authoritative government. We have also have Young woman, Sara Johnson, coming to visit her imprisoned husband and being greeted with the four-letter word “Who’s that fucking woman? What’s that fucking woman doing here? Who let that fucking woman through that fucking door?” (p.262)

Pinter portrayed silences throughout the play to demonstrate his technique as well as his focus on the power of the play's setting (prison). In the visitors' room, the Elderly woman attempts to speak to her imprisoned son, but she is not permitted by the guard because the mountain language is forbidden; therefore the people can't say, the second scene shows directly how domination and language are interrelated. The guard cannot understand the Elderly woman lack understanding and he loses all his humanity and thrust her with a stick: Guard: Forbidden! Language forbidden. She looks at him. He jabs her, Prisoner: She can't speak i The consecutive silences are always a favourite of Pinter's, and meant to belong: at least five seconds are caused by the guard's lack of understanding of what the prisoner is telling him. After the prisoner has told the guard twice that his Elderly woman cannot understand him and his language, later the woman and her son's voices are heard in voice-over. In a second visit, the rules have been reversed. The Elderly woman is permitted to speak but she can't at the sight of her flow of blood torture son. This is the forbidden message of Mountain Language. The Elderly woman does not respond to her son's question. That silence which is a refusal to communicate is one of the foremost images of Pinter's plays. The moment, which ends the play, maybe when the Elderly woman has lost her ability to use the language or it is that she cannot trust his arbitrary reversal. This last silence, it may call for justice and if not for justice, at least for pity. It is the death of hope for the Elderly womant Silence She doesn't speak it Silence (p. 258)

Conclusion

Mountain Language portrays the political Abuses and the moral degeneration of the cruel utilitarian systems. Pinter is able to show the ways and tactics endorsed by totalitarian regimes to rule and govern people. Here he shows how language is used a political tool to govern its people

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