

Sanjay Kaushal

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Deleuzian study of Society and Power

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Language as a Command – Deleuzian study of Society and Power

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Abstract: *The intended idea of this paper is to understand language as a command or the most powerful ideology through which the mechanism of power and subordination is put into practice. Therefore, language cannot be seen as something that can be used by people to ‘share’ or ‘communicate’ their thoughts coherently with the other, for the very idea of ‘sharing’ and ‘communication’ does not bring out the politics of two identical terms – I and you – which are prominent in everyday speech in which ‘being’ is expected to be identified with the features of imposed categories of ‘binary classificatory system’. Consequently, paper goes on to discuss the very inability to experience ‘communication’ in everyday speech, except in literature through writing.*

Key terms: *being, sharing, communication, everyday speech, binary classificatory system*

As Saussure points out, linguistic sign is the signification resulted from the bilateral relationship between signifier and signified. Saussurian notion on linguistic sign was discarded by Jacques Lacan, a French scholar in the 1950s, rewriting the relation of signifier and signified as an ‘algorithm’ S/s. In his formulation through which he tried to give a scientific vein to Freudian psychoanalysis, the signifier lies over the signified, and the horizontal bar in the algorithm “‘resists’ the entry of a signifier into the signified preventing signification”. Therefore, the elements of language do not consist of signification. Instead of signification, what we can see is a chain of signifiers. “What occupies the place of the signified, according to Lacan, is the ‘symbolization of a law’, which is a law of sexual segregation, regarded as universal law, and forming part of the founding law of culture. The chain of signifiers refers, ultimately to an unconscious ‘Real’ that is characterized by an originary lack of the childhood trauma of forcible sexual segregation. Being inserted in a chain of signifiers, and being run by the engine of a primordial desire, a subject’s speech signifiers ‘something other than what it says’” (Manjali, 2000:187). It is the unconscious

desire that is being expressed as language in which signified remains in the form of mark never fully manifested. Therefore, in Lacan's view, "all language is desire".

However, psychoanalysis of language brought by Freud and Lacan is limited to the family domain. It is all about a matter of infantile sexual desire for mother's body which is repressed by father. It is a matter of repressed memories of childhood or even of phantasms. Therefore, language uttered by man at any age has to be understood as the very repressed desire of his childhood. Contrary to this notion, Deleuze and Guattari try to bring language into a wider domain writing *Anti-Oedipus* as a point of departure from the conventional psycho analysis. Accordingly, they discuss about language in relation to socio-political and economic domain. As Deleuze points out "You don't reproduce childhood memories, you produce blocs of child-becoming with blocs of childhood which are always in the present" (Deleuze and Parnet; 1987: 78).

Deleuzian idea on language is not about how man is situated in the family under the pressure of his father which prevents his desire for mother's body, but about the way man is situated under the political repression in socio-political and economic domain. As Deleuze explains, it is the very political repression that comes out as language and it is through this language social institutions practice its power to order, control, and maintain the society. Therefore, Deleuze considers language, not as "the desire for Other", but as "a Command" through which world is ordered.

Considering Deleuzian idea, language cannot be understood either as the vehicle of thought or as the way to information. It is a command to which everybody should obey. "It is made not to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 76). The order-word, the elementary unit of language, can appear as in the form of "the command, the expression of obedience, the assertion, the question, the affirmation or negation". "When the schoolteacher explains an operation to the children, or when she teaches them grammar, she does not, strictly speaking, give them information, she communicates orders to them, she transmits 'order-words' to them, necessary conforming to dominant meanings" (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987: 22).

Our response to language is not just verbal but also physical. It commands us to behave controlling our bodies like a man, woman, child, an adult, a citizen, a subject and so on. But it does not try to explain what type of behaviour is required to behave like a child or adult assuming the fact that there is a "general way" that one should behave according to

one's "status". No one should be ignorant of this "general way" or "everyday concepts" which confirms "the dominant meaning" with its "fixed image". There cannot be any other way to define anything 'beyond' the way that has been already defined, because the possibility of having other definitions shows the existence of disagreement which can be a threat to the "order of discourse". According to Deleuze, we are supposed to agree with the everyday concepts "so that we *do not* have to think...Everyday concepts, then, allow life to carry on in an orderly or functional manner" (Colebrook, 2002: 15). "Everyday concepts" that are dominant and fixed, through which the life is structured and to which our body is submitted, reduce differences in to "already known forms". "Because it assumes that there simply *is* a common world, there to be shared through language as information and communication. (Colebrook, 2002: 23-24).

The order-words, through which we are reminded the order of life and thoughts to maintain the order of the society, fix us into a 'binary classificatory system', such as man/woman, black/white, left/right, good/evil and so on. According to Deleuze, binary system, which governs the distribution of roles, does not 'exist only for reasons of convenience' as "the base 2' is the easiest'. It is also 'an important component of apparatuses of power' through which some "consistency" can be given to the "chaotic and infinite differences of experience and life". In such a system, we have to be in one category at a time. As an example, one cannot be a man **and** woman at the same time; it has to be a 'selection' decided in terms of '**either**' otherwise '**or**'. This is a 'forced choice' made by language. One's selection to be in one category is considered as the negation of the other category. This can be understood through an everyday experience like filling an application. Application that we used to fill when we apply for an exam, a job, a grant and so on is always loaded with number of questions to which we should answer making a choice. Most of the questions are 'Yes'/ 'No' type questions to which we do not have to say much except using the 'given symbols', '√' / '×'. According to the choice we made filling the application, we are put into the category of 'female' or 'male', 'married' or 'unmarried' and so on. We cannot make a choice to be in "in-between", as the word '**either**' and '**or**' are so 'common and dominant' making a choice.

The category which we are clubbed into has 'features' that are common to every member of the particular category. We are recognized or identified according to this classification with its own features. Concerning the features of classification, 'face' is very important, and 'all types of face is determined on the basis of this model'. In that sense, 'even

the madman must have a face corresponding to some type which we expect of him' (Deleuze and Parnet; 1987:21). It is the very recognition that constitutes our 'identity' reducing us into 'some common features'. 'Identities' such as identity of men, women, citizens, communities, nations and etc. on/of which modern world is so much concerned and bothered are the results of 'binary classificatory system'.

As Althusser points out, 'mechanism of recognition' is the way in which every ideology calls individuals into place and confers 'their' identity on them. In that sense, language is the most powerful ideology that can practice its power over bodies. It constitutes anyone as its subject through hailing.

Thus, once our identity is recognized, we are labelled with that 'identity' and arranged in the rack of the society just as the way books are numbered and arranged in racks in a library according to the disciplines that they belong. This is such an easy way of maintaining a library; it is easy for both the sides -i.e. library authority and the user. The only thing that they should do is to maintain a clear catalogue system through which one can have easy access to find the 'location' and 'position' of the books. Here, number and book should correspond to each other so that the number becomes the identity of the book and book becomes the identity of the number, even the number, location, and the title cannot say much about the book. Similarly, the 'identity' that labels us cannot say much about individuals except their location in the society in terms of gender, nationality, religion, race, cast, class and so on. Census reports, passports, identity cards, birth certificates, death certificates and so on are some examples for catalogues that are usable for searching the exact location of an individual in the rack of the society. However, no one can be away from this system. That is how the society is ordered. Therefore, we are supposed to continue with our 'given identity' with first person narration 'I' or 'we'.

In above sense, it is possible to understand that the two terms "I" and "you" available in everyday concepts and speech do not bring the idea of 'sharing thoughts' or 'communication'. Because, when we use "I" and "you" in a sentence that 'I' utter, one has to necessarily be the agent or the doer of the action, while the other has to be the patient or the goal. Here, we cannot see any kind of sharing. It creates the environment of giving and receiving. In such a context, there has to be a decision maker who is going to decide 'what' is to be given, 'how' to be given and 'whom to be given. Thus, where there is a practice of

decision making , there is a practice of power and discrimination. In that sense, **either I or you** becomes powerful and dominant, therefore, one of us inevitably becomes a 'subject'.

But, if our intention is to consider language is a way of sharing thoughts, then we need to understand the very idea of 'sharing'. In the context of "sharing", no one remains static. Also, no "body" is completed. Both of us – "I" and "You" - are transformed through "sharing" and that transformation which occurs within us due to the relationship that exists between us and, also the transformation that happens in the 'in-betweenness' are unpredictable and undecidable. In this continuous transformation, neither "I" nor "you" remain in our own absolute positions. Two of us become other in response the other, which comes out from both of us. Therefore, each moment, we find novelties in our relationship. These novelties do not renew the already existing relationship, but it creates or constructs a new relationship. The relationships that appear and disappear in the space 'between us' cannot be reduced to a particular definition or any kind of category. Not only relationship, but also the "sharing", which causes for infinite relationships, happens without having any particular thing to share. Due to these two reasons, we can no longer use "I" and "you" in communication. Communication never happens, when there is "I" and "You". In that sense, we can no longer consider our everyday speech or language as communication. As Deleuze explains, language 'is made not to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 76).

Communication through which man experiences its inherent nature of "becoming" appears in literature through writing. Literature is nothing but "communication itself". "It is the passage from one to another, the sharing of one by the other" (Nancy, 1991: 65) literature designates the being itself, since literature does not come to an end. This can be understood in two ways. One way is to say that "literature does not come to an end at the very place where it comes to an end: on its border, right on the dividing line – a line sometimes straight (the edge, the border of the book), sometimes incredibly twisted and broken (the writing, reading). It does not come to an end at the place where the work passes from an author to a reader, and from this reader to another reader or to another author. It does not come to an end at the place where its narrative passes into other narratives, its poems into other poems, it's thought into other thoughts, or into the inevitable suspension of the thought or the poem. It is untended and unending – in the active sense – in that it is literature. And it is literature.... that puts into play nothing other than being *in common*" (Nancy, 1991: 65).

Considering above ideas, that have inevitably immersed in certain amount of imagination, the common fact for each kind of thought irrespective of whatever the theoretical approach one would employ, language that is used in everyday life and concepts can be understood as the most powerful ideology through which the mechanism of power and subordination put into practice to maintain the very order of the order of things in the world or things in the things. It is this very order or the structure, which appears in and through everyday language, that can be overcome in and through literature through writing.

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