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# **An Analysis of Cooperative Principle in Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Old Stone Mansion***

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Language is a social and cultural institution. It is a tool of social (and many of other types of) communication and interactions. Linguistics is the scientific study of the natural languages. Pragmatics, as one of the major branches of linguistics, basically studies how the utterances (in real life and/or in literature) made by the communicator communicate a certain meaning to establish communion with the listener. It encompasses speech act theory, politeness principle, cooperative principle, talk in interaction and other approaches to language behavior. An application of cooperative principle to the dialogues in Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Old Stone Mansion* has been studied in this paper.

An underlying assumption in most conversational exchanges seems to be that participants are co-operating with each other. This principle, together with four maxims was first set out by H.P. Grice (1975). The cooperative principle is stated in the following way: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged." Supporting this principle are the four maxims:

## **1. The Maxim of Quantity:**

Make your contribution as informative as is required, but not more, or less, than is required.

## **2. The Maxim of Quality:**

Do not say that which you believe to be false or for which you lack evidence.



### 3. The Maxim of Relation:

Make your contribution relevant to the aims of the ongoing conversation.

### 4. The Maxim of Manner:

Be clear, brief and orderly in your conversation.

It is expected that these maxims will be obeyed by the conversational partners in a healthy conversation. All the above discussed principles are observed and violated universally in literary works (and in real life communication too) to create artistic and/or linguistic effects and to communicate certain message(s). Drama has been chosen for the application of these principles because, drama texts, being scripts for the performing of pseudo-conversations, can be successfully approached with techniques originally developed to analyse real conversation (Coulthard 2007: 182).

### About the Play *Old Stone Mansion*

*Old Stone Mansion* (1989) is one of the best plays by Mahesh Elkunchwar. The Deshpande's have a rich feudal past associated with their name and social status. In the course of time it has all come to an end. The monetary condition of the family is in absolute adversity. They all live a disintegrated frugal life. All family members have their own specific way of living. The familial affection and attachment is absent in every character whether they are living in Dharangaon or in Bombay. The family have differences and separated over the issue of rural-urban disagreement. Bhaskar and his family grumble Sudhir, his younger brother, for not paying any attention to them. Sudhir shares the fact that he has been living in Bombay for many years besides, he doesn't give up his job in Bombay to adjust in the rural settings. This disagreement instigates and survival for the family. Bhaskar, Sudhir, and Prabha are brothers and sister even though they are not unified with the family members or the other people in the society. When their father Venkatesh dies, Bhaskar follows the ritualistic practices and makes arrangements

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to feed the whole village on the thirteenth day of Venkatesh's death. Sudhir strongly opposes the fact. Bhaskar is a man who believes in following customs and rituals as he is living in village, while Sudhir believes in "practicality". Sudhir and Anjali feel that it is illogical and useless to spend on the post-demise rituals. But the Deshpandes don't get rid of their old false beliefs. In order to protect their family honour they go on blowing money on baseless customs despite their meagre family income. Dadi and Aai suffer a lot due to rigorous existential crisis.

### Violation of the Quantity Maxim

When people converse with one another, they may or may not follow the cooperative maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner. The constrictions of situation and context compel people to deviate from these norms. People differ in their nature and attitude. Different people have different ways of handling situations. Some people feel it easy to be truthful while others make some kind of adjustment to be truthful. In short, psychological as well as contextual conditions compel a person to be cooperative or non-cooperative in conversation. "Make your contribution as informative as is required, but not more, or less, than is required" is an underlying assumption of the maxim of quantity. As far as the maxim of quantity is concerned following is one of the examples from *Old Stone Mansion* where violation of the Quantity maxim is observed.

In *Old Stone Mansion*, when Sudhir asks Vahini whether Dadi has been informed about the death of her son Vyenkatesh or Tatyaji. Vahini answers elaboratively.

SUDHIR: Have you told Dadi that Tatyaji's no more?

VAHINI: What do we tell her even if we want to? Her hearing's gone, her sight's gone. Nothing reaches her. That's how she sits all day, not moving. But every now and then it's: 'What time is it? What time is it?' Actually she's no trouble at all. Carry her to her plate when it's time to eat; carry her to her bed when it's time to sleep. There's been such a tragedy in the house-her own son's gone- but do you think she understands? Happy soul. I mean that. Will you have tea at least? Or not even that ... (Act 1, sc i: 140) (51)

Here, Vahini is supposed to answer with 'yes' or 'no' instead, she answers Sudhir with a question 'What do we tell her even if we want to?' Question answered with a question is one of the stylistic features of Indian English. Vahini has indirectly stated the fact that Dadi is not informed about Tatyaji's death, for telling it to her or otherwise will make no any difference to Dadi. She adds the fact Dadi has lost her sense of hearing and seeing. She goes on describing Dadi's dotage condition in their family. By giving extra information she wants to tell the fact that Dadi is not in a position to understand any grief or pleasure. She considers her a burden on their family.

#### Violation of the Quality Maxim

Do not say that which you believe to be false or for which you lack evidence (Grice 1975), is the quality maxim. Be truthful is the idea behind this principle. Conversational partners are supposed to follow this maxim for making the communicative act fruitful. But however, contextual and psychological pressure, personal nature, interest and social phobia can compel communicator to flout this maxim. Many times people tell lie to hide something which can bring them disgrace. To save the face or maintain the social status also a lie comes as an handy. Following is an instance from the play where Quality maxim is violated.

RANJU: Have you seen Amitabh, Sudhir-kaka?

SUDHIR: Sure. He comes to our milk booth everyday to buy milk.

RANJU: What lies!

SUDHIR: Really! Even Jaya comes over to borrow this and that!

RANJU: But the stars are so rich!

SUDHIR: Not as rich as the Deshpandes. Now go and get some tea for your Kaka.

RANJU: Right away. *Ji haan*. Where's Rajkamal Studio, Kaka?

SUDHIR: Oh, Rajkamal? Right behind our house! Now go, get that tea! (Act 1, sc iii: 159-60)

In this piece of conversation, Sudhir is not in a mood to talk with Ranju. Ranju who is mad after bollywood film stars, is asking

questions to Sudhir as he is living at Bombay. Sudhir answers her question in the sarcastic manner. He says that Amitabh and Jaya come to the market to buy this and that and Rajkamal Studio is also near their house. Ranju knows that Sudhir is lying. And Sudhir expects that Ranju should understand that the maxim of quality is being flouted. His intention is that Ranju should give up asking such bleak questions and bring a cup of tea for him.

#### Violation of the Relation Maxim

Make your contribution relevant to the aims of the ongoing conversation" is how Grice (1975) describes the relation maxim. Communication partners should make their conversational contribution relevant is the rationale behind this maxim. In any kind of communication, it is a prerequisite that participants in a conversation should be clear and relevant in their expressions of thoughts. And interestingly, in human conversation, it is not the case. Speakers do not hold on the Gricean maxim of cooperative principles all times. There are various factors which intervene the way of upholding the maxim of relation. In the following example maxim of relation or relevance is violated to change the subject of ongoing talk.

BHASKAR: When did the telegram reach you?

SUDHIR: Day before yesterday. We left immediately.

BHASKAR: Hmm. I was wondering what happened. It was already past ten. I thought perhaps you hadn't got the telegram at all.

SUDHIR: The train reached Amaravati late. The last bus had left by then. We had to take a taxi.

BHASKAR: Tatyaji gave us no time at all. He got up from his evening pooja and collapsed on the spot. I shouted, 'Tatyaji! Tatyaji!' But it was all over. (Act 1, sc i: 137)

In this example, Bhaskar initiates the conversation by asking, 'When did the telegram reach you?' and accordingly speech acts are exchanged between the conversational partners. Sudhir doesn't ask for what happened to Tatyaji, even though Bhaskar tells him the incident of Tatyaji's death. Bhaskar's flouting of relation maxim



exemplifies the change in the topic of ongoing conversation. This change in the topic keeps the ball of conversation rolling. Through this flouting of relation maxim, audience comes to know about the death of Vyenkatesh.

#### Violation of the Manner Maxim

Grice states manner of maxim as "be clear, brief and orderly" in your conversation. The maxim of manner aims at avoiding ambiguity and obscurity of expression. Verbosity may cause failure in communication. One should be clear enough to make a sense through words; his communicative should be economical and processible. Use of oblique language and code words makes the message difficult to be decoded for the hearer.

In *Old Stone Mansion*, Vahini flouts the maxim of manner. To perform the post demise rituals of Vyenkatesh, Deshapndes need some money to purchase groceries. Following interaction takes place between Vahini and Chandu.

CHANDU (to Vahini): Vahini we'll have to arrange for some money somehow.

VAHINI: What's this now?

CHANDU: Bhau sent me to ask Sudhir. He doesn't have that much.

VAHINI: And where should I get it from?

CHANDU: Everything will have to be paid for. Bansilal won't give credit. We'll need at least seven or eight hundred rupees.

VAHINI: Knock my teeth out and take them. (Act 1, sc ii: 147-48)

Being the eldest daughter-in-law, Vahini holds important position in the family. Chandu asks Vahini to arrange some money to purchase the groceries for the post demise rituals of Vyenkatesh. Bhaskar and Vahini expect that Sudhir should aid economically to meet the expenditure. But he doesn't have that much amount. Vahini gets annoyed and flouts the maxim of manner by saying, 'Knock my teeth out and take them.' The phrase used by Vahini is commonly used by the Indians to refer when they don't have money to spend. Though Vahini flouts the maxim of manner, the hinted meaning of her utterance is understood by the hearers who are

familiar with the Indian phrases and expressions. But such phrases can confuse the non-native speakers of Indian languages.

When people converse with one another, they may or may not observe the maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner. There are several factors which determine observance or flouting of these maxims. Context, mood, attitude, intention of the speaker, relation with the hearer and different ways of handling situations by different people are illustrated in a variety of ways in plays or fictional writing. It is easy to see how communication can break down if speakers do not follow these maxims. At the same time, it is true that literariness of literature is an outcome of the violation of these maxims.

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