



SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS OF MULK RAJ ANAND'S SHORT STORY 'THE PARROT IN THE CAGE'

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ABSTRACT

Pragmatics has been considered one of the powerful tools to analyze fictional discourse especially that occurs in short stories, dramas and novels. The short stories of the Indian writers in English are replete with speech acts of the characters which reflect interpersonal and social relations in the contextual speech situations and speech events. Mulk Raj Anand's short stories are based on the ordinary incidents in the life of common people. Therefore, an attempt is made in this article to analyze Mulk Raj Anand's short story 'The Parrot in the Cage' taking into consideration the typology of Speech acts developed by J. R. Searle, the disciple of J. L. Austin who is considered as the originator of the speech act theory. The categorically selected speech acts from this story are analyzed in the light of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary dimensions. The speech acts of the characters such as assertive, declarative, commissive, directive and expressive are thoroughly discussed against the socio-cultural context.

Key words: Pragmatics, speech event, speech situation, locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary, assertive speech act, declarative speech act, commissive speech act, directive speech act and expressive speech act, interpersonal relation, social relation, interlocutor,

1. INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand, a renowned Indian writer in English, journalist, editor, political activist and short story writer was born in a family of coppersmith in Peshawar now in Pakistan on



December 12, 1905. He breathed his last at Lonawala near Pune on the 28th September 2004. He is one of those Indian English writers who is known for his down-to-earth and compassionate portrayal of the downtrodden in India. In his childhood, he used to play with the children of the sweepers in the neighborhood for which he was reprimanded by his parents as they were orthodox. He was traumatized as a small child when he saw one of his close relatives committing suicide. She committed suicide because she was ostracized by the family members on account of sharing food with a Muslim. In those days sharing food with a member from the downtrodden community was considered an act of pollution.

Mulk Raj Anand attained name and fame not only in India but he also became very popular at the international level for his prolific writing of short stories and novels in the early stage of his life. In his novels *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936) he depicted the exploited class of the Indian society. Since he had befriended famous English writers E. M. Foster, George Orwell, W. B. Yeats, Herbert Read and others, he would often go to London and come back to India. He was very much involved in Indian freedom struggle movement as he was greatly influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence. He had been also influenced by a systematic campaign of Mahatma Gandhi against the social evil of untouchability. He tried to identify himself with the dispossessed and the disadvantaged class of people. He looked upon Gandhi as a very powerful leader with a sense of social commitment. He felt that he should write on the people who were dear to him in his childhood. To be more precise, his experience with the downtrodden in his boyhood days convinced him to write something on the subject of untouchability. Incidentally, he happened to read a story of a young untouchable boy in the weekly named 'Harijan' edited by Gandhi. It excited the imagination of Mulk Raj Anand as he was prompted to write a letter to Gandhi seeking his appointment. He wanted to meet Gandhi personally and seek his advice in the matter of writing a novel or a short story. He came to Mahatma Gandhi at Sabarmati Ashram and showed him the first draft of the novel *Untouchable*. Gandhi told him if he had no experience of scavenging he could and should not write a novel on scavengers. Gandhi advised him to stay in the Ashram and work as a scavenger. On the advice of Gandhi, Anand stayed in Gandhi's Ashram at Sabarmati for a year and did the work of cleaning the dirt of the people there. It is to be mentioned here that his experience with Gandhi made him a writer with a sense of commitment.

Mulk Raj Anand fictional works include short stories, novels and essays on various themes such as innocence of childhood, untouchability, miserable condition of the plantation workers, exploitation of the poor, injustice, malnutrition etc. Therefore, for his depiction of the plight of the underprivileged people he is rightly called as a Charles Dickens of India. The following is the major contribution of Mulk Raj Anand to Indian English short stories:

Short Stories:-

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1. *The Lost Child and Other Stories (1934)*
2. *The Barbers' Trade Union and Other Stories (1942)*
3. *The Tractor and the Corn Goddess and Other Stories (1947)*
4. *Reflection on the Golden Bed and Other Stories (1954)*
5. *The Power and Darkness and Other Stories (1954)*
6. *Selected Stories (1955)*
7. *Lajwanti The Power and Darkness and Other Stories (1954)*

The Parrot in the Cage: At a Glance

The touching story 'The Parrot in the Cage' by Mulk Raj Anand deals with the traumatic experiences of the refugee woman Rukmani during the partition of India and Pakistan. Self-esteem, conflict, anguish, loneliness, misery and struggle for existence are some of the major themes of the present story. Rukmani is the protagonist of the story whose pathetic struggle for existence during the India-Pakistan partition process is described by Anand realistically. The story mirrors the wounds of the heart of an old woman caused by the holocaust of partition. She has to work as a maid servant in the houses of the landlords for her survival as she has no kith and kin in Lahor, Pakistan where she stays. She becomes desperate as her earnings are inadequate and expects help from others. Being old she cannot bear the sudden unpredictable change caused by partition. She is forced by the historical upheaval to leave behind whatever she has at her disposal. Many people during the partition process lost their livelihood, relatives and friends, property and their nationhood. Mulk Raj Anand vividly depicts the plight of Rukmani and other refugees during the partition period using Indian English.

Rukmani is the resident of Lohor of the Punjab Province in Pakistan. She tries to cross over to Indian side on the advice of her friends and well wishers. Her neighbors and friends are worried about her safety. They think that if she does not migrate to Indian side, her fate will be left in the lurch. She musters her courage and makes an attempt to cross the border in order to come into Indian Territory. She carries with her the parrot in the cage who is her only companion. While migrating she forgets to tie the money which she has earned by working as a housemaid in the knot of her dupatta. As soon as she starts migrating to Amritsar in the Punjab Province of India, she encounters a communal inferno on the border between Hindus and Muslims from newly formed Pakistan and India. She squats on the fringe of the road, a furlong away from Amritsar Court because of the weariness after travelling a long distance. She is told by the well-wishers especially a gram-seller that the Deputy Commissioner is going to rehabilitate the refugees. She hopes to meet the Deputy Commissioner and get some assistance from the government. On reaching there she notices a long queue of the refugees who have come to settle their claims. She also stands in the long



serpentine queue waiting for her turn to meet the Deputy Commissioner in the hope of some tangible help. She is informed by the gram- seller that she will not get anything from the Deputy Commissioner. She is also advised by him to go to Durbar Sahib temple for getting food and shelter. She becomes awfully disillusioned and utterly frustrated as she begins to lose hope. To add insult to her injury, the police arrive on the scene and start beating and battering the people standing in the queue for help. She also becomes a victim of the lathi charge of the police. She is thrown back where she is sitting due to the pandemonium caused by the emergency situation. The gram-seller assumes her to be dead on looking at the bruises on her hands and arms. He rescues her from the devastating condition. Her parrot in the cage flutters its wings in panic while looking at the plight of his mistress in distress. Rukmani is in sheer confusion as she does not know where to go for food and shelter. She is deeply dismayed and traumatized to experience the holocaust of the partition. She has nothing but to lament her miserable fate. At the end of the day Rukmani feels disappointed and her agonies increase because of the unsympathetic attitude of the government authorities. Thus, the victims of the holocaust of the partition are tormented to such an extent that they have no or little hope to live a secure and dignified life.

4.10 Speech Act Analysis

The plot of the story ‘The Parrot in the Cage’ gyrates around Rukmani and her parrot in the cage with the mocking bird’s instinct. Rukmani, the protagonist of the story, was living in Kucha Chabuk Swaran in Lahor, Pakistan with the parrot in the cage, her sole companion. Since the focus of the story is on the protagonist and her parrot, there are few conversations of the characters. There are monologues in this story which are worth studying with the help of pragmatics in general and speech act theory in particular. The parrot has been personified in the story. It speaks in the human way some terms of address and asks questions of primary nature. For instance, the story opens with the address term “Rukmaniai, in Rukmaniai” in the way Rukmani’s friends called her when they came near her house. The bird would repeat the call even before she could answer. In reply to the repeated call of her loving parrot she would say “Han, my son. Han...” The response given by Rukmani is associated with the loving bond between the bird and herself. The woman in the context addresses the parrot as her son. This does mean that she loves her bird as the mother would love her son. It also means that there is solidarity in their relation. Additional very often Punjabi expressions used by the parrot are “Ni tun kithe hain?” and “Ni tun ki karni hain?” directed to Rukmani. In order to say something in response to the bird’s mocking calls, she would say “nothing my son, nothing.’ She would say that she was waiting for the Sahib. She had come there in the hope of getting some money from the Congress Sarkar. Pragmatics of the following monologue of the old woman is worth studying:



“Are you hungry my son-----you must be hungry... I shall buy some gram from that stall keeper when the Sahib gives me money...” (p. 56)

The speaker is addressing to the parrot in the cage as “my son” which is to be understood in the context. The old woman loves her bird so much so that she calls her ‘my son’. Here, one notices the loving and affectionate interpersonal relation between the bird and the old woman. She knows that the bird must be hungry since she had no money to buy grains for it. Therefore, the last speech act of the woman is the instance of commissive speech act. She gives the promise to the bird that she will buy some grains from the gram seller nearby if she gets money from the Sahib. The word ‘Sahib’ is used in the context of District Commissioner.

There was a gram seller who heard the old woman talking to the bird in the most affectionate way. He felt mercy in his heart. The following utterances of the gram seller are worth studying:

“Mai, you are dreaming! You have gone mad! Go, go your way to the town, you may get some food at the Durbar Sahib temple. You won’t get anything from the Dipty Collator...” (p.56)

The address term ‘Mai’ is to be understood in the Indian socio-cultural context. It means ‘mother’ in English but the word has acquired an extended meaning over the years. In India, a very old lady receives high respect in the society. In other words, it is an honorific term showing deep respect in Indian context. The gram seller addresses the old woman ‘mai’ even though she is a stranger to him. The first two utterances of the gram seller are the instances of expressive speech acts as they articulate the genuine emotions of the gram seller. It appears that he is very much worried about the plight of the old beggar woman who has come to the junction of the Mall Road in the hope of meeting the Deputy Commissioner and getting some financial help from him. The illocutionary force of the first utterance is that the woman in the context will not get anything from the government authorities. He thinks that the woman should not wait there for so long as there is no point in waiting. The illocutionary force of the second speech act is to make the woman aware that she does not understand the real situation. She has in reality not gone mad. The speaker’s intention is to make the old woman aware of the fact that she will get nothing from the Deputy Commissioner. The third utterance is the instance of a directive speech act because he really expects the old woman to go to the Durbar Sahib temple which is located in the town. He is directing the hearer to follow his instructions so that the woman will get some food to fill her stomach. The last utterance of the gram seller is an instance of an assertive or representative speech act as it amounts to provide some kind of vital factual information. The intention of the speaker here is to tell the old woman in the context that she won’t get anything from the Deputy Collector. He makes a



deviation in pronouncing the word 'Deputy Collector'. It, therefore, clearly indicates that he is uneducated or illiterate. The perlocutionary effect of the speech acts of the gram seller is felt on Rukmani for she begins to fling verbal abuses at the gram seller. She bitterly shouts:

"Vay, jaja, eater of your masters!" (p.56)

One notices that the above utterance of Rukmani falls in the typology of expressive speech act because she is terribly angry with the gram seller for misleading her. In her opinion the gram seller is ruining her hope of getting some money from the Deputy Collector. She uses the Punjabi words 'Vay, jaja' which mean that she is not ready to accept the advice of the gram seller. She expresses her anger by using the strategy of code mixing. She mixes some Punjabi expressions such as 'Vay Jaja' followed by English words. The perlocutionary effect on the gram seller was that he wanted the woman not to abuse him unnecessarily. He only said that for the good of the woman in the context. The following linguistic expressions of the old woman are worth studying;

"Oh, why did I leave home to wander like this from door to door! Oh why did you have to turn me out of my room in my old age, God...Oh why... Why didn't I tie the rupees I had earned in a knot on my dupatta!..Hai Rabaa!" (p.57)

All the above speech acts of Rukmani, the protagonist of the story are the expressive speech acts since they tend to articulate her genuine agonizing feelings. The speaker seems to be blaming the circumstances for her miserable condition. At times, she thinks that she should not have left home and wandered from door to door for food. She is blaming the God for the suffering caused by the migration. She uses the code switching strategy to express the intense emotion of helplessness caused by the partition between India and Pakistan. The above speech act is a monologue as the old woman is seen talking to herself. There is no conversational partner here. Therefore, there is no question of perlocutionary effect. It is to be understood here that Rukmani's inner feelings are expressed by the above speech act.

On noticing the old woman sweating profusely in the heat of the sun, the gram seller's heart melted with pity. He wanted the old woman to sit under the shade of a tree. He uttered:

"At least go and sit under the shade of the tree." (p. 57)

The above utterance of the gram seller falls in the typology of directive speech act the reason being that it is aimed at giving the old woman a piece of advice. The gram seller is the speaker and the old woman is the hearer of the utterance. The speech situation is that the woman was crouching on the road in the blistering heat of the sun. The gram seller saw that



the woman was sweating profusely. Therefore, he advised her to go and sit in the shade of a tree. It is a suggestion given by the gram seller to the old woman. As a perlocutionary effect the old woman got up and went to sit in the shade of the tree near the gram seller's stall. She lifted iron cage in which her pet parrot was sitting and settled down to the secure place. As soon as she settled down, she could hear the sound of rushing feet of the people. They were heading towards the gloomy gates of the Kentuki where the Deputy Collector was supposed to arrive. The demonstrators were demanding help from the government for their rehabilitation. Let us examine the following speech acts of the people:

“Hujoor, Mai Bap, hear us, Sarkar! Dipty Saheb... We have come on foot all the way from Lahor... You...” (pp. 57-58)

If we look at the above utterances of the people in chorus on the road leading to the station, we realize that they are the glaring examples of expressive speech acts involving code mixing and code switching strategy. Indian English is always marked by this linguistic strategy for creating socio-cultural reality. The utterance “Hujoor” is used to address a high ranking person in the Indian context. In this case it is used for addressing the Deputy Collector. The word ‘Mai Bap’ is used as the giver of shelter and food. The word ‘Sarkar’ is used as an address term with respect to the high ranking individual in the government. The utterance ‘Dipty Saheb’ is used for the person who is a Deputy Commissioner of the region. All these expressions are used by the people in the process of migration from Pakistan to India to appeal the Deputy Commissioner to make arrangements for food and shelter as they have become homeless for the historical reason. They have travelled all the way from Lahore, Pakistan on foot to the Indian border. All the above speech acts are instances of expressive speech acts because of the strong emotional appeal they contain. The address terms such as ‘Huzoor’, ‘Mai Bap’, ‘Sarkar’, and ‘Sahib’ are honorifics which are used in the north Indian context only. The problem of dislocation has been brought out by the above expressions. Homeless people had to depend on the mercy of the high ranking people in the government to cater to their basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter.

The crowd was moving in the direction of the railway station where the Deputy Commissioner was to arrive to resolve the grievances of the refugees who have come there from Lahore braving the heat and dust. The crowd involved men and women and was uncontrollable as it continued marching towards the court. The policemen began to charge the refugees with lathis. Some of the powerful men among the crowd brushed past the old woman as a result of which she was thrown away from where she was squatting. She was able to cling to the handle of the cage in which her parrot was calling out shrilly her name in panic. After the crowd had been cleared, the gram seller came on the scene to know the condition of the old woman. He was irritated by the constant cries of the parrot in the cage. He was afraid that the old woman had died. The gram seller was relieved as he noticed that

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the old woman was alive. He lifted her up and tried to console her. The following short conversation between the old woman and the gram seller is worth studying;

The gram seller; Come and sit in the shade, mother.

The old woman: Acha son, acha. (p.58)

On close examination of the utterance of the first speaker one comes to know that it is an instance of a directive speech act for the simple reason that it contains a command. The locutionary act is performed via the declarative sentence whereas; the illocutionary act is indicated by its suggestion or advice. Here, the hearer is advised by the speaker to sit in the shade. The old woman was the victim of the stampede caused by the crowd of refugees. The gram seller addresses the old woman as mother. It is interesting to note that in the Indian context old women are addressed in the name of mother. The illocutionary force of the gram seller's speech act is understood by the old woman as she sits in the shade. The illocutionary force of the old woman's expressive speech act is to thank her conversational partner, the gram seller. She uses the Punjabi or Hindi words to express her gratefulness to the gram seller for saving her life. Finally, the old woman gives blessings to the gram seller. She says:

"May you live long, son." (p. 58)

The above utterance of the old woman is a glaring example of an expressive speech act as it contains blessing in the Indian way. It is to be made clear that in India, elderly people give blessings to the younger ones. The locutionary force of the old woman's speech act is indicated by her feeble voice. The illocutionary dimension of the above speech act is to give blessing to the hearer of the said utterance. The speaker regards the gram seller as her son. Therefore, she prays to God to give him a long life.

The story ends on a pathetic note with the monologue of the old woman and her parrot's repetitive calls in her name. Her monologue reveals that she does not know where to go hereafter. She tells her pet parrot in the cage that she does not understand where to go for food and shelter. Thus, the acute tribulations of the refugees are brought out through the speech acts of the characters in the story under consideration.

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