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**Socio-cultural Context of Communication in Indian Novel:  
A Pragmatic Approach to *Inside the Haveli***

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**Abstract**

Novel has its own genre-specific features of communication. Indian novel is marked by certain culturally 'anchored linguistic choices' (Verschueren: 1999: 75). The communicational dominance of Indian socio-cultural context over the native variety of English is manifested through the use of literal translation, transliteration, paraphrasing etc.

Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* (Mehta: 1977) showcases various culture-specific peculiarities of Indian English. The cultural shock of the protagonist evolves the communicational intricacies out of the changed socio-cultural context. The migration of the protagonist from one region to another changes and enlarges too the socio-cultural context of communication in this novel.

Though the novel mainly evolves the regional peculiarities of communication, at times the cultural canvas of regional setting is stretched to fit the national frame of multiculturalism in India. The present paper treats *Inside the Haveli* as the delimited area of the study of Indian novel, the socio-cultural context of communication as the topic of the study, whereas the pragmatic approach as the perspective of the study.

To sum up, the paper attempts to tap the multivalent socio-cultural context of communication outside and inside the 'haveli'.

## **Identity Crisis as the Major Focus**

Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* (Mehta: 1977) is a remarkable novel from the viewpoint of the communication in its socio-cultural context. It's the story of the protagonist Geeta's identity crisis in the cross-cultural context. Brought up in Bombay, Geeta the independent young woman struggles to maintain her modern identity in a traditional world of the haveli of Udaipur, where she is married off. The aristocratic culture of the haveli and the setting of Udaipur in Rajasthan evolve the socio-cultural context in the novel.

## **Theoretical Preamble**

The study of communication obviously includes the various 'communicational components' (Mohan K. & Banerji M.: 1990: 06) used in the socio-cultural context. The use of language is the most important communicational component studied here. The novel explicates several examples, where language is used meaningfully, without bothering for the accuracy. The 'goal-oriented' (Leech, 1983: 13) effectiveness of communication gets an edge over the accuracy of the language use. The following remark, precisely, explicates the same character of the language use.

'Language plays the most important role in communication... for specific purposes in different situations that have their own socio-cultural as well as psycholinguistic dimensions... language use involves understanding of the addresser-addressee relationship, their needs and the context in which communication happens. Propriety, thus gains importance over accuracy, and the principles governing interpersonal relations over the rules governing sentences' (Thorat and Lokhandwala, 2009: preface).

This is where the language use differs from the 'language as a system' (Thorat and Lokhandwala, 2009: preface). Moreover, the 'language use' being operational phenomena, rather than a structural one, is never a linear communication, especially when the same operates in the socio-cultural and literary contexts. So, to explore the operational phenomena of this kind, the article adopts a pragmatic approach, that can be justified as follows.

## **The Pragmatic Approach**

Unlike the approaches of linear communication—e.g. Saussure's 'speech circuit' (Saussure: 1974, in Chandler: 2002: 176), which is called 'a two-track linear model' (Chandler: 2002: 176)—the pragmatic approach adopted here is multi-dimensional. However, no special perspectives like 'pragmatics of translated or transliterated or paraphrased utterances', as found in *The Pragmatics of Translation* (Hickey: 1998); or 'pragmatics of style', as found in *The Pragmatics of Style* (Hickey: 1990) are adopted here.

It is for this reason that the areas like the ‘translatability’, the ‘cultural overlap’ and the ‘cultural diffusion’ (Lyons: 1981: 322-329) fall outside the scope of the present article. Although the article mainly focuses on the verbal communication, it does not ignore the ‘ideational’ and ‘interpersonal’ (Halliday: 1970 & 1973, in Leech: 1983: 56) non-verbal communication; and also the context of the non-verbal means of communication studied under the disciplines like ‘Kinesics’ (Birdwhistell: 1952), ‘Paralanguage’ (Welmers: 1954) and ‘Proxemics’ (Hall Edward: 1966). Mary Key in her *Paralanguage and Kinesics* (Key Mary: 1975) mentions the significance of the ‘temporal aspects that affect the communication behaviour’ (Key Mary: 1975: 128). Inside the Haveli has number of occasions, where the temporal aspects that affect the communication behavior of the characters in the novel.

### **The Concept of Context**

On the basis of the above discussion, context emerges as the widest area of communicational, studies. The vast area of context has been explored from different perspectives, e.g. as ‘context of situation’ and ‘context of culture’ (M.A.K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan: 1989; Kramsch Claire: 1998; and others). Malinowski (1935) correlates the study of context with ‘the activities performed in the actual situation’ (Malinowski: 1935: 22). As the context of communication is a multifold area, it obviously requires a ‘polyperspectivistic approach’ (Earnest W. B. Hess-Luttich, 1991 in *Literary Pragmatics*, ed. Sell Roger D, 1991: 237) to analyze the communication in the present novel.

Hence, at the backdrop of the above discussion, the pragmatic approach adopted here becomes justifiable. Pragmatics is centrally concerned with the use of language in the context. ‘Pragmatics can be usefully defined as the study of how utterances have meanings in situations’ (Leech: 1983: X). The communicational intricacies can be pinpointed with the help of the model of the ‘contextual correlates’ by Verschueren (Verschueren, 1999: 76). According to him, ‘the linguistic choices are contextually anchored’ (Verschueren, 1999: 75). If the linguistic choices are anchored in the context, it becomes essential to throw light on the element of context in the present novel.

The socio-cultural context of the novel includes a whole lot of the haveli culture at the backdrop of the setting of Udaipur in Rajasthan. Obviously, the core of the communication is a regional variety used in Rajasthan. However, besides the Rajasthan dialect, the protagonist—who is brought up in Bombay—and the narrator use language differently. Thus, though the socio-cultural context is mainly regional, at times it gets enlarged and projects the national face of multiculturalism.

### **Verschueren’s Model of Contextual Correlates**

The following part of the paper adapts the model of contextual correlates by Verschueren (Verschueren: 1999) and reviews the theoretical account of its parameters used for further analysis. According to the model, the linguistic choices of the ‘utterers and the interpreters’

(Verschueren, 1999: 76) are anchored in the mental, social and physical ‘worlds’ (Verschueren, 1999: 75) The narrator and the characters in the novel play as the utterers and the interpreters, whereas their three worlds include a whole lot of the communicational context.

The mental world —according to the model—includes the personality, emotions, beliefs, desires, motivations, intentions etc of the communicators. The social world includes the component of ‘person deixis’ (Verschueren, 1999: 91) in relation with the social and cultural dimensions.

The cultural dimensions include the contrast between oral and literate societies, rural versus urban patterns of life, or a mainstream versus subcultural environment. The social dimensions with which the linguistic choice-making is interadaptable include social class, ethnicity and race, nationality, linguistic group, religion, age, level of education, profession, kinship, gender, sexual preference, and so on (Verschueren, 1999: 92).

The physical world includes temporal and spatial aspects of communication. According to Verschueren, ‘Temporal deixis and spatial deixis are the most studied, and most visible, ways of anchoring language choices into a physical world’ (Verschueren, 1999: 95). The temporal references are the time-specific linguistic choices and the spatial references are the place-specific linguistic choices.

### **Parameters of Analysis**

The communication in this novel can be explored in its context, which is embedded in the three worlds, as stated by Verschueren (1999). His model of contextual correlates offers a longitudinal view of the three worlds, which are used here as the three parameters of analysis.

#### **Three Worlds *Inside the Haveli***

*Inside the Haveli* (Mehta, 1977) vividly shows the three worlds as the context of communication: i. the mental World, ii. the social world, and iii. the physical world.

The novel depicts the story of an independent young woman named Geeta, who struggles to maintain her modern identity in a traditional world. Geeta is an educated, vivacious Bombay girl, who is married off into a conservative family. The haveli culture curbs her identity with ‘purdah’ (Mehta, 1977: 03). Her independence and progressive views are at stake. Geeta is sandwiched between her modern values and the conservative culture of the haveli.

Precisely, *Inside the Haveli* explores a journey of an individual in the cross-cultural context, wherein like the other characters in the novel, the protagonist undergoes and, unlike them, overcomes too the identity crisis at the mental, social and physical level.

### **The Mental World in the Novel**

The mental world of the context includes the personality, emotions, beliefs, desires, motivations, intentions etc. of the characters in the novel. The mental world of Geeta, the protagonist and Lakshmi, the maid servant are explicitly evident in the novel. Geeta's predicament as an oppressed daughter-in-law and that of Lakshmi as a maid servant best reflect the components of the mental world of context. The following citation from the novel throws light on Geeta's mental state.

Geeta tossed and turned in her bed. A cold sweat erupted all over her body as she thought of the day ahead of her. The noise from the kitchen below her room woke Geeta up well before dawn. ... she was still not comfortable moving around with her face covered. (p.29)

Geeta is bothered so much so in her mental world that her communication with the servants is also influenced. She addresses Pari, the maid servant as 'Pariji' (P.10). Geeta experiences a cultural shock, as she undergoes a cross-cultural journey from the unorthodox culture of her parents to the conservative culture of the haveli, where she is married off. In her parents' home men and women talked quite freely ... But in the haveli men were regarded with awe as if they were gods (p.21).

Besides Geeta, there are other characters—mainly the female characters like Lakshmi, Ganga, Dhapu, Sarju, Pari, Kanwarani sa, Bhaba sa etc.—who also operate their communication in more or less the similar mental context of the world, as that of Geeta.

### **The Social World in the Novel**

The social world consists of the social and the cultural dimensions. The communication in this novel is influenced by the social class like the aristocrats of the haveli, the Mewar dialect, low level of education, gender, sexual preferences in communication etc. The social status of the family, being very high, influences the communication in a downward hierarchical trend. The sense of power obviously influences the communication. 'The strong words of the mistress had a sobering effect on all the servants. ... and then the maids rushed around' (p.129)

The cultural dimensions, as mentioned earlier, include 'the contrast between oral and literate societies, rural versus urban patterns of life, or a mainstream versus subcultural environment' (Verschuere: 1999: 92). The well-educated family of Geeta's parents in contrast with the in-laws of Geeta; Bombay life versus the haveli life; the aristocratic class of culture versus the servants' class of culture are a few glimpses of the cultural dimensions of the social world. The following remark brings out the very essence of the socio-cultural circumstances in the novel. 'In Udaipur we keep purdah. Strange eyes must not see your beautiful face (p.17). The haveli leaves an indelible mark on the communication in the novel.

### **The Physical World in the Novel**

The physical world of the novel is full of temporal and spatial references. The spatial references include the places like the city of Udaipur, the various havelis, the haveli of Sangramsinghji, the men's apartment, the rooms of the daughters-in-laws and the rooms of the servants etc. These references form the core of the spatial physical world of the context in the novel. The temporal references are evident in the description of the early and the middle twentieth century, what operate as the time of the action in the novel.

The novel opens with the following description of the setting that brings out the details of the time and the place of action.

Udaipur was once the capital of State of Mewar; now it is only a town like many other towns in Rajasthan. But the change in its status hasn't diminished its beauty, nor the air of mystery that hangs over what is now known as the 'Old City'. It is surrounded by the bastioned wall ... and the city within it. (p.3)

The city of Udaipur, thus, forms the physical spatial world of the context. Besides this, the description of the haveli and the time-specific references in chapter-1 & 2 (p.3-10) too contribute to form the physical world of the context in the novel.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, the influence of the contextual worlds on the communication in the novel is obviously manifested through the representative samples discussed above. On the basis of the same the paper concludes with the following observations.

## **Observations**

1. The sense of power influences the communication of the characters in this novel.
2. Some characters in this novel undergo a movement from power center to periphery and vice versa in their communication and behavior.
3. The social status of the family influences the communication in a downward hierarchical trend in this novel.
4. The Indian socio-cultural context is vividly evident as the backdrop of the communication in the novel.

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