


Exploring Connotative Meaning of Laxmi's Dialogues in Vijay Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder*

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ABSTRACT

Pragmatics highlights the implied meaning of a dialogue in the light of its context. The same theory of meaning in context has been used in the study of this research paper. The basis of the study is H. P. Grice's cooperative principle and its maxims. The main focus of the study is to see the implied meaning of an utterance whenever the maxims of cooperative principle are flouted. The play is a representation of gender bias in the contemporary patriarchal society vividly penned by Vijay Tendulkar. The basis of the study is to fathom the meaning beyond the dialogues of the protagonist Laxmi in the play 'Sakharam Binder' by Vijay Tendulkar. Though the literal meaning of the dialogues is self-sufficient to portray the characters and its suffering, the implied meaning or the unspoken emotions of the character Laxmi has more to reveal. Hence, the dialogues of Laxmi are read and studied in light of her trauma of getting abandoned by her husband, getting exploited physically and emotionally by a womanizer Sakharam, her helplessness, her agony after getting the allegation of theft from her nephew etc. The findings of the study reveal that Laxmi has lost all hopes initially. She is jolted by the kind of treatment she receives from the male dominated society. It's the fear of getting thrown out of the house of Sakharam, which compels Laxmi to tolerate the atrocities and not to be vocal about it. Superficially, it appears to be normal for her. But the connotative meaning makes the readers realize the loss, disturbance, anger, dejection, hopelessness, suffocation, frustration of Laxmi. Thus, the study of unspoken meaning becomes pivotal compared to the denotative meaning of Laxmi's dialogues. She represents the females that undergo such tragedy because she is She and not He.

Keywords: *Pragmatics, Patriarchal society, Gender bias, Connotative meaning, Denotative meaning, Agony.*

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Introduction

Searle, J.R. in his book *Speech Acts* says that all linguistic communication involves linguistic acts or actions. It means every utterance has a function to perform. In present study too Vijay Tendulkar hit the contemporary society where it is the weakest through his linguistic communication. To quote Searle, J.R. he says, “often we mean more than what we actually say” That means the meaning is not there in the dialogue. It is beyond the dialogue. It is in the mind of the speaker. If the listener is able to decipher it correctly that is where the communication becomes successful. Similarly, Tendulkar doesn't use his imagination to create a suffering character. He finds it around himself in the same society where he spends his life. He simply picks a character and a situation and pens them down. The characters speak on behalf of Tendulkar indirectly. This is how the masterpieces like Ghashiram Kotwal, *Silence! The Court is in Session* and *Sakharam Binder* has been written by him. Vijay Tendulkar, hammers the political people in *Ghashiram Kotwal*. He exposes the male dominated society in *Silence! The Court is in session* and *Sakharam Binder*. The whim of male domination that treats women as a mere toy of pleasure and satisfaction has been brutally exposed by Vijay Tendulkar in the play *Sakharam Binder*. In his Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics, David Crystal says that “communication is said to have taken place if the information received is the same as that sent”. This means that it is a prerequisite to understand an utterance beyond its dictionary meaning. Vijay Tendulkar has used language as a weapon to expose the contemporary male attitude. Brown and Yule suggest that language can perform many functions. According to them, language's main and important function is to communicate information. Though the language used in an utterance means something literally, it may have different meaning in different situations. Hence, the scholars felt the need to study the dialogues of the female protagonist Laxmi in light of Pragmatics. It means going beyond the superficial dialogue to fathom the deeper meaning expressed by the sufferer. H. P. Grice

Hypothesis

The dialogues of Laxmi have more to say than what is said in them. The connotative meaning is different from the denotative meaning in the dialogues of Laxmi. The real trauma and agony can be revealed, if the meaning of the dialogues is studied in the light of the context they are uttered.

Significance of the Study

As a reader, one has the right to understand a piece of literature from every perspective. Hence, it's prerequisite to understand in and out of a dialogue that is articulated by a character. In order to make readers understand beyond the dialogue the study has been undertaken. The scholar wants to make the readers aware that the context in which a dialogue is spoken has much more to say as compared to the literal and dictionary meaning of the dialogue. The study of the connotative meaning of a dialogue has the power to change the opinion of a reader about a character. The context in which a dialogue is spoken influences the meaning of the dialogue significantly. Hence, the study gets more importance in order to understand the dialogue beyond its physical existence in a play and novel.

Scope of the study

The study gives a new realm of understanding a piece of literature. It makes the readers search for another meaning or layers of meaning in the context in which the dialogue is uttered. Therefore, it may be a satisfying experience for the readers of Vijay Tendulkar's play to understand the dialogues spoken by female characters. It is because they are dominated, made to suffer not because they have done something wrong, but because of their gender. The very gender has become a curse for them. Such characters and their dialogues, if studied in light of connotative meaning, may be an opportunity for readers and research scholars to apply the theory of implied meaning to other literature and enjoy the piece of literature beyond what is written on the pages.

Limitations of the study

The study focuses on implied or connotative meaning. The connotative meaning has its counterpart in the form of denotative or dictionary meaning. But, the research paper has not discussed the denotative meaning. The context in which the study relies on is specifically based on contemporary society and its follies. Hence, the context lacks universality. Hence, it is not to be applied everywhere. The meaning that is researched is specific for the play. Hence, even if the same situation or context is there in another play, the same meaning can be fathomed. The cultural context in which the play has been written is particularly applied to Indian society. Therefore, the context may not be useful in every culture.

Research Methodology

The study has used a qualitative approach to explore the dialogues of the protagonist Laxmi from the play Sakharam Binder. The technique of the study is content analysis. The primary source of the study is the play Sakharam Binder written by Vijay Tendulkar. The analysis of the play is done in light of connotative meaning which is one of the major terms of Pragmatics. The scholars have studied the text minutely and analysed the dialogues of Laxmi in terms of implied meaning based on the context the dialogues are spoken in.

Research Objectives

1. To explore hidden meanings of the dialogues articulated by Laxmi, the female character of the play Sakharam Binder.
2. To study if the social, historical and situational context influence the meaning of a dialogue.
3. To find out if emotional turmoil like fear, anger, jealousy, and insecurity may alter what is said from what is unsaid.

About the play Sakharam Binder

It's a play written in 1972 by Vijay Tendulkar. The author has touched on the topic of live-in relationship, which contemporary society never imagined. The live-in relationship has created such a furrow in the society that the play was banned. It is because it challenged the very base of Indian society that considered marriage institutions as a sacred relationship. On the other hand Sakharam, a binder by profession is a womanizer who takes undue advantage of abandoned women. In the name of giving them shelter he exploits the dejected women emotionally and physically. He uses them to satisfy his sexual needs and use them as house maids. He gives zero importance to the institution called marriage without bothering contemporary society. Laxmi is his seventh victim. He is always in search of such abandoned women and the ones who have lost their husband and they have nowhere to go. Sakharam calls himself superior and pure over the husbands who left their wedded wives as he gives them support and safety in return for their abuse. Thus, the theme of the play was not digested by the male dominated society. The dominance of male gender has been exposed by Vijay Tendulkar in a terse manner without any inhibitions. The play has another similar story of Champa who deserts her husband and is brought by Sakharam after throwing Laxmi out of his house as she had started dominating and arguing with him. His male ego did not tolerate the arguments and retorting of Laxmi. So she was shown the door and immediately she was replaced by Champa.

A twist comes in the play when Laxmi comes back to Sakharam once she was alleged by her nephew of stealing money. It is Champa who adjusts with Laxmi and allows her to stay with them. Later Champa develops an illicit relationship with Daud, the only friend of Sakharam. The same matter is reported by Laxmi to Sakharam. His male ego gets shattered and in a fit of anger Champa is murdered by Sakharam.

Connotative Meaning

Linguistics studies a language scientifically. Pragmatics is one of the branches of Linguistics that studies how meaning of any utterance is influenced by social, cultural and situational context. Pragmatics has two major terms called connotative meaning and denotative meaning. Denotative meaning refers to a dictionary meaning whereas connotative meaning refers to an implied meaning. M. H. Abrams in his dictionary of literary terms defines Connotative meaning as a range of secondary significations and feelings. Thus, connotative meaning is the hidden meaning that is not available in the dialogue. The listener has to decipher the connotative meaning as per the context. Context refers to the setting or situation in which the dialogue is spoken. The context may be a cultural context, social context, political context, literature context, historical context, personal relation context etc.

Example

A: The window is open

B: (closes the window and then switches the air conditioner on) Thank you!

In the above conversation A simply informs B about the window being open. He/she does not tell B to close the window. On the basis of situational context, a reader can understand the real meaning of the utterance. It's the context that reveals the meaning of the dialogues. The listener gets the correct message by the information and closes the window before starting the AC. Besides this, there are following meanings to the utterance that the readers can get out of it.

1. A and B may be colleagues of the same rank. Therefore, A is not ordering B to close the window.
2. A himself/herself may not be in the position to close the window. The window may be far from A. So, he/she is requesting B to do the needful.

3. A might want to tell B that the AC would not be effective if the window is open.
4. B might not have paid attention to the open window. So, A might be asking B to close the window before starting the AC
5. A may not want to offend B so he/she is not ordering B to shut the window.
6. A might be warning B not to switch on the AC without closing the window.
7. A may be telling B not to switch on the AC as the window is open and there is enough cool air for them. There is no need to use AC. Thus, there can be layers of meaning based on the context. That's why it may be interesting to explore the dialogues of Laxmi from the play Sakharam Binder written by Vijay Tendulkar.

Results and Discussion

Levinson has defined Pragmatics as study of language and its usage in context. The very definition given by him is the basis of this study. The scholars have tried to connect the meaning of Laxmi's dialogues with the context in which they are uttered. Dr. Ashok Thorat too has given importance to the context of an utterance in analyzing five novels. He is of the opinion that the meaning of an utterance is based on who speaks, to whom, why, when, where and how? Scholars have tried to see the context of all Laxmi's utterances from the play Sakharam Binder. One of the major themes of the play Sakharam Binder is exploitation of deserted and destitute women by Sakharam. Mr. Sakharam shelters women who have been deserted by their husbands and in-laws or who have lost their husbands. Under the pretext of giving shelter and safety to these homeless and obsolete women, Sakharam exploits them physically and emotionally. He makes them serve him as his personal maids. At the beginning of the play, readers know about Lakshmi as one of the women he had brought to his house in the guise of giving her a shelter. Laxmi has lost her husband and Lakshmi has nowhere to go. Even her parents are not in the position to care for her. That's why, in a state of helplessness Lakshmi agrees to stay with Sakharam Binder. He makes Laxmi agree to his terms and conditions. The terms include doing all household jobs and satisfying him sexually. One thing that should be clearly mentioned here is that though the study is about the connotative meaning of Laxmi's dialogue, there is no single dialogue of Laxmi in Act-I and Scene-I. The implication is to make readers aware about how much personal opinion and space women had in contemporary society. Even when Laxmi is asked about the name of her husband, the food she ate etc. she hardly speaks. It shows the kind

of trauma she has gone through. After a lot of insistence of Sakharam she feebly responds that she is observing fast of Chaturthi. At this moment readers come to know about the following dialogue of Laxmi. The dialogue has many things to say.

Sakharam: Do you want to kill yourself by fasting like this?

Laxmi: I am used to it.

In the above dialogue of Lakshmi, readers come to know about a modal auxiliary 'used to'. The use of the modal auxiliary suggests habitual action in the past. Thus, as a reader it is very clear that Lakshmi was observing many fasts in earlier life too. One more implication or a connotative meaning of Lakshmi's dialogue is that maybe she was not given proper food by her husband and in-laws. One of the beliefs behind observing a fast is to get favor from the almighty so that the life of human beings becomes nice and happy. If Lakshmi was observing fast on and often, it suggests that everything was not good in her life. It might also mean that she was deprived of two meals a day. It might be because of the dominance of her husband and her in-laws. Thus, in the very beginning of her conversation Lakshmi talks a hell lot of things that she has to bear in the past.

After the above substantial dialogue of Lakshmi it takes a very long time for the readers to get another very important dialogue of Laxmi.

It is observed that the majority of the time she is talking with insects like black ants. She has no one to share her feelings and emotions with. When she is found talking with ants she is labeled as a crazy person by Sakharam. She is not cared for by Sakharam, even if she burns her legs. Once almighty Ganapati was brought to the house, the faith and belief of Laxmi is brought to the notice of readers.

When Ganapati Aarti is being sung by all, Lakshmi tells Dawood not to recite the Aarti. Therefore, Dawood stops singing. It is objected to by Sakharam. Then, Dawood is asked by him the reason behind his silence. Therefore, he asks Lakshmi

Sakharam: I see. Why shouldn't Dawood sing Aarti?

Laxmi: Becausehe is a Muslim, isn't he?

The implied meaning of Lakshmi in the above dialogue is Ganapati is a Hindu deity and only Hindus have the right to pray and worship Ganapati Bappa. She can't digest the idea of Dawood being a Muslim singing the Aarti of Ganapati. Therefore, she instructs Dawood not to sing

Aarti. It is not tolerated by Sakharam. The dialogue also indicates that Lakshmi is a strong believer in Ganapati and Hindu deities. Laxmi does not tolerate the idea of a Muslim taking part in the rituals of Ganapati Bappa. It also shows that she is intolerant towards other religions when it comes to her God. She shows that she is not secular when it is the matter of her belief and faith in Ganapati Bappa.

Sakharam does not like Lakshmi stopping Dawood from singing the Aarti of Ganapati Bappa.

He starts beating her. At that time the dialogue of Laxmi makes readers introspect. “Laxmi: (straightens up her body and is still twisted in pain) if you want to beat me, beat me inside, not in front of God. He has only come to the house today.”

In the above dialogue, it is implied that Lakshmi has accepted beating. She is not bothered about her being beaten by Sahara or her husband. She has assumed that it's a kind of tradition for females to get beaten by males. That's why she is ready to be beaten. The only objection she had was that she should be beaten inside the house and not in front of Ganapati Bappa. It also shows her strong faith in Ganapati Bappa. She doesn't want to fight and quarrel in front of her lord, Ganapati. She wants to pray for her God in peace and silence. It shows how the male dominated society has stereotyped women. As if, it was very casual and common for females to get beaten.

In scene nine of act one, Laxmi is seen to stand for herself. She is vocal about the pain, the torture and the overloaded work that she has to do every day.

Sakharam: Make a cup of tea. Quick!

Laxmi: (grumbling). I am getting it. Wait. I almost died bringing the water in. You think I am made of stone? When I am dead, you will be free of me.

Sakharam: (gets up and comes to the kitchen) what did you say?

Laxmi: I have put the water on to boil.

Sakharam: First, repeat to me what you said just now.

(Laxmi watches the water boiling)

Why don't you repeat what you said? Go on!

Laxmi: (suddenly bursts out) you think I am afraid to tell you? How much more can a person bear? It's been a year now since I entered this house. I have not had a single day's rest. Whether I am sick or whether it is a festival day. Nothing but work all the time. You torture me the whole day. You torture me at night. I will drop dead one of these days and that will be the end.

In the above dialogue the implied meaning can be discovered. It shows that Laxmi has enough of the atrocities of Sakharam Binder. She cannot tolerate anything anymore. She has no tolerance left. That's why she becomes vocal about the pain she has to undergo every day. She is retorting Sakharam. Initially, she tries to avoid the escalation by changing the topic. But ultimately her anger and frustration are vented out by her. Now, she has gathered the courage to face Sakharam Binder because it has been more than a year since she has been tolerating his atrocities. Now, she has understood that it cannot be worse than this. So, she has to take a stand for herself, otherwise her death is very close. She tries to convince Sakharam Binder by hinting about her death. She assumes that by such a threat, Sakharam Binder may change his attitude towards her. She wants to make it very clear to Sakharam that she has been continuously working for him without a moment of rest. Now she is not ready to tolerate the torture that takes place 24/7. For the first time in the play, she has awakened. She has taken a strong stand for herself without considering its consequences. It is because in any case she was in hell.

Lakshmi tolerated the atrocities of Sakharam till 1 year. After that it was unbearable for her to undergo the same pain and torture. So, she starts answering back to him. He insisted that she should leave his house. Then Lakshmi utters the following dialogue.

“Laxmi: I'd have gone where my feet took me. Or else I'd have jumped into the river. Did I come to your door begging you to take me in? If I'd drowned myself in the river, that at least would have been the end of all my troubles.”

The implied message about the above-mentioned dialogue is really pathetic. Laxmi knows that she is homeless. She has no place to go. She has been abandoned by her in-laws. Her parents were not in the position to give her shelter. It shows the hopeless situation the female has to undergo once she becomes a widow or she is deserted by her husband. The sad reality of contemporary women has been exposed in this dialogue. The torture of Sakharam was unbearable but she had no choice to leave the house. At the end of the day as a reader it is realized that Laxmi does not want to be a victim of her situation, now. She is ready to revolt. She wants to take the things in her hand. She is ready to face the worst in her life. She is not afraid anymore. Indirectly, she suggested to Sakharam that it was he who brought her to the house and she never begged him to give her shelter. There is another terrible Message in the dialogue. The women who were deserted by their husbands and the women who had lost their husbands, they had only one option left in front of them. It was to commit suicide. The situation of such females is revealed. They were completely a parasite; they didn't have their own

identity; they had no value at all. They were denied basic rights and they had only one option to end their troubles was to end their life. In fact, the whole contemporary society had planned for the death.

The metaphor of dead hen compels readers to introspect and imagine about the worst condition of females like Laxmi.

Laxmi: A dead hen doesn't fear the fire! Nothing more terrible can happen to me now. I've been through everything in this house. The whole world knows what goes on here. Even the children talk.

Lakshmi compares herself with a dead hen. The dead hen doesn't have any emotion or life left in it, the dead body of the hen is not bothered, whether it is fried or cut into pieces or put in a boiling curry, similarly Laxmi too is not afraid of revolting against Sakharam and its consequences. She knew that she didn't have any place to go but the torture of Sakharam was so unbearable that she could not control herself and she started replying back. The saturation of tolerating pain has taken place. She is not at all afraid of the consequences because she knows that the condition she is in cannot be worse than that.

Indirectly, the contemporary society has also been criticized bluntly by Lakshmi. She points out that all the people around the house of Sakharam know that dejected females are exploited in the house. They don't help or interfere. That means the people too have given permission for the exploitation. So, the spectator-like attitude of the people has been ironically put forward. Laxmi represents a homemaker in the following dialogue.

Laxmi: You must never sweep the house soon after someone leaves it. It brings you bad luck, they say. And ruin the family. I'll just sweep the place and then we can start.

Lakshmi appears to be superstitious in the dialogue. But she prays for the good of the family. Laxmi shows that she is a perfect homemaker. She has been tortured by Sakharam. He is throwing Laxmi out of the house. But she cares for the home and Sakharam. She doesn't express any ill for the house. It is because she assumes herself as a family member. Though she is not legally wedded to Sakharam she has accepted him as her husband and owned the house. It shows that she is a perfect example of a good homemaker. Unfortunately, he fails to realize it and is ready to desert her.

There was none to be a friend of Laxmi. So, she has developed friendships with ants and crows.

Laxmi: Come. [Suddenly] Oh, I forgot one thing.

Sakharam: What was that?

Laxmi: I'd forgotten to put out sugar for the ants. I'm glad I remembered.

[Goes to the window. A crow is cawing outside.]

I'm off, Crowie dear. He used to come here every day. And he'd eat only when I fed him. Who'll feed him now?

Superficially, it appears that Lakshmi has made good friends with the ants and crows seen around the house. The connotative meaning is that there is no neighbor, there is no one around the house, no human who wants to talk to her. She has no one to share her feelings and emotions. She is completely alienated. That's why being a human once she gets time, she starts talking to herself and talking to these birds and ants. This is how she can relax and vent out her suppressed emotions of frustration and torture. Indirectly, she wants to suggest that the ants and the crows are far better as compared to humans around her. They are at least listening to her bleeding soul. Now, she is worried about who will be the next woman coming into the house. She is doubtful if she would be able to come back ever again to feed the crows and ants. She also suggests that the crows and ants are affected and they are sad as she is leaving the house. On the other hand, Sakharam is not disturbed by her departure.

Conclusion

In the words of J. L. Austin, it can be said that we get many things done with the help of language. So is Mr. Tendulkar in his plays. He gets the follies and atrocities of males exposed with the help of his characters like Laxmi. Vijay Tendulkar has always been a man who writes reality even if it is gross. Sakharam Binder is such a play that talks about colossal male dominated society. The attitude developed by males towards females has been brutally exposed and criticized by Tendulkar. Laxmi, the female protagonist, has been instrumental in exposing contemporary Indian society. The dialogues of Laxmi denote that she is at the mercy of males. She has nowhere to go after the death of her husband. She talks about the agony that she has to tolerate. She is meek and silent. She is helpless and shelterless. She has been physically and emotionally exploited. She has to obey what is asked. She has no one to share her emotions. She revolts and is again thrown out of the house. She has no relief at all. She is always at the mercy of Sakharam who represents all contemporary males. The whole play is a tragedy of a woman who has been deserted. She is alone. She finds it painful that her parents are too unprepared to accept her.

On the other hand, the connotative meaning of the dialogues has many things to reveal. The price that a female has to pay for being a female. Laxmi is a mouthpiece of Tendulkar to expose the patriarchal mindset of the then society. The attitude of treating women as toys. To play with them, and once the male is bored of her, abandon her. If a child is not born, only females are held responsible for it. If a man is dead, throw away the wife to fend for herself. The modus operandi of the male dominated society is noteworthy. Men did not allow women to get educated and in a way women were never independent. The strategy was that the females should be completely dependent over males to survive. Because of this it was easy to use them as maids and toys to get satisfied sexually and use them as machines to give birth. Almost every dialogue of Laxmi if analysed closely reveals that the real cause of the suffering and exploitation is not the gender. The real cause is the dependence of females over male for food, cloth and shelter. The females were denied education, they were made to accept the fact that they were females and they had to simply satisfy the sexual urge of males and in return get food and shelter. Laxmi is one of the representatives of such females who were exploited, used and then thrown like cattle to be butchered by the butchers like Sakharam. The catharsis of the female condition is seen when everyone knows about the exploitation and no one objects it. Everyone accepts it as a ritual. A ritual of exploitation by males because they were males. There was no equal opportunity or right. No human dignity. No self-esteem. Just be there for the needs of males.

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