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## **A Perspective of Politeness Principle in Mahesh Elkunchwar's**

### *Old Stone Mansion*

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#### **ABSTRACT:**

*Application of theories from pragmatics to literature is one of the recently developed methods of studying literature. Pragmatics is basically interested in utterances. Among the various genres of literature, drama makes profound use of utterances. The dramatist creates men and women who speak to each other and from this communication we gather the story of their life. In drama there is no narration. There is no plain or fancy description like fiction; there is first and only dialogue and Pragmatics is interested only in analysing these dialogues or 'language-in-use'. The present paper delineates to analyse dialogues from the play *Old Stone Mansion* by Mahesh Elkunchwar in the light of politeness principle from pragmatics.*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

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 made by the communicator communicate a certain meaning to establish communion with the listener. It encompasses speech act theory, politeness principle and co operative principle, talk in interaction and other approaches to language behaviour.

Pragmatics is basically interested in use of language by the speakers in a specific situation. Politeness principle holds a significant place in Pragmatics. It is an important part of social

conventions since in all cultures, however different they are, politeness in addressing others is a kind of observed code of behavior that one has to adhere to Alaoui (2011). Linguistic strategies of the co-conversationalists in any situation are either polite or impolite. Commonsense and observation tell us that politeness plays a key role in making communication a successful activity. It shows good manners, etiquettes and consideration for others so participants in conversation like polite approach. Impolite way of communicating disturbs or breaks the conversation process. Politeness also maintains the context of conversation to keep the ball rolling. It further reveals the nature, attitude, intention, desire and expectation of the speaker. Most importantly politeness avoids hostile antagonistic terms to maintaining the face of conversational partners. Along with pragmaticists; sociolinguists, psycholinguists, sociologists, anthropologists and authorities on business communication have worked on the phenomenon of politeness strategy in communication.

Brown and Levinson developed in their *Politeness Some Universals in Language Usage* (2010) the ‘Positive and Negative Politeness Strategies’. The list of positive and negative strategies as follows

**Positive Politeness**

Notice/attend to hearer’s wants

Exaggerate interest/approval

Intensify interest

Use in-group identity markers

Seek agreement

Avoid disagreement

Presuppose/assert common ground

Joke

**Negative Politeness**

Be conventionally indirect

Question, hedge

Be pessimistic

Minimize imposition

Give deference

Apologize

Impersonalize

State the imposition as a general rule

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Assert knowledge of hearer's wants	Nominalize
Offer, promise	Go on record as incurring a debt
Be optimistic	
Include speaker and hearer in the activity	
Give (or ask for) reasons	
Assume/assert reciprocity	
Give gifts to hearer (goods sympathy etc.)	

Brown and Levinson (2010: 102, 131)

Besides these Brown and Levinson's Politeness Strategies, Yamuna Kachru and Lary Smith, in their *Cultures, Contexts, and World Englishes*, (2008) mention that there are twelve parameters through which politeness is observed in every speech community. They are 'values', 'face', 'status', 'rank', 'role', 'power', 'age', 'sex', 'social distance', 'intimacy', 'kingship', and 'group membership'.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR MAHESH ELKUNCHWAR**

Born on 9th October, 1939, Mahesh Elkunchwar holds an honourable position in the evolution and development of Marathi theatre. Elkunchwar emerged onto the national theatre scene with the publication of his one-act play *Sultan* in 1967 in noted literary magazine *Satyakatha*. His plays present a grim picture of postmodern socio-cultural existence at the backdrop of post-independent urbanity in India. Elkunchwar an eminent playwright has written more than twenty plays till date and is working as a screenwriter. Today, he is one of the most prominent and progressive playwrights along with Vijay Tendulkar influencing not just modern Marathi theatre, but modern Indian theatre. Elkunchwar experimented with several forms of dramatic expressions ranging from realistic to symbolic and expressionist to absurd theatre. Some of his notable creations are - *Atmakatha (Autobiography)*, *God Son*,

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*Holi, Sonata, Pratibimb (Reflection), Party, Wada Chirebandi (Old Stone Mansion), An Actor Exits, Desire in the Rocks.* His plays have been translated into multiple Indian and Western languages including English, French and German. Elkunchwar has been honoured with Maharashtra Gaurav in 1990 and Saraswati Samman, one of India's highest literary awards, in 2003. He is also the recipient of nationally and internationally acclaimed fellowships.

The *Old-stone Mansion* is one of the best plays by Mahesh Elkunchwar. It deals with variety of themes and ideas. The Deshpande family has 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 the domestic conflict where everybody tries to signify their sacrifice and survival for the family. The death of Venkatesh, their father brings two families together. It symbolises that human civilization has reached at a grave state.

### **POLITENESS PRINCIPLE AND DRAMA**

Politeness strategies are applied to real life conversations; however scholars have discussed the possibilities of applying these strategies to literary works. Apropos why is politeness useful in the study of drama? Jonathan Culpeper in his *(Im)politeness in Dramatic Dialogues* (2002) opines, "Broadly speaking, politeness is about the strategic manipulation of language, about expediting our conversational goals by saying what is socially appropriate. A framework that brings together *face* (an emotionally sensitized concept about the self) and sociological variables (such as power and social distance) and relates them to motivated linguistic strategies is going to be particularly useful in helping us understand (1) how characters position themselves relative to other characters, (2) how they manipulate others in pursuit of their goals and (3) how the plot is pushed forward. Such a framework will allow us to describe systematically, for example, how one character might ingratiate them with another or how one character might offend another". We can understand the linguistic behaviour by deciphering the linguistic discourse employed by the dramatist in the play. The study concentrates on how characters in the play *Old Stone Mansion* by Elkunchwar communicate

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most effectively and harmoniously by using positive and/or negative strategies. The context in which characters are presented and the language used by them is drawn from an Indian background. Social factors like solidarity, social status, power, role, distance, situation etc do affect politeness.

### **POSITIVE POLITENESS STRATEGIES**

Due to the limitation of the study, expressing concern for the addressee, offering sympathy, cooperation and intensifying interest to H are the politeness strategies discussed. To expressing concern for the addressee what do we use? Obviously words, form of a address which carry meaning. Address and reference terms are the indicators of politeness. As Thorat (2002: 82) views that forms of address have meaning as well, but on a closer look the semantics of address variants turn out to be a complicated matter because there are several kinds of meanings involved as far as forms of address are concerned. Prominent among these are literal, referential and social. Literal or lexical meanings of forms of address point to certain groups as follows:

1. Master, senior, superior
2. Companion, comrade
3. Friend, acquaintance
4. Relative

Referential meanings and literal meaning of forms of address may differ occasionally. Literal meanings are the prime content of forms of address. In Indian culture often kinship terms are used as address terms. It can create difficulty to reveal the meaning. For eg. A speaker addressing another person as his brother may use the term ‘brother’ in literal or extended meaning. It means the if the addresser and the addressees are brothers, the form of address has literal meaning. And if the addresser and the addressee are not brothers, the use of kinship term brother has an extended meaning.

In Marathi a married woman is supposed to call *Vansa* and *Bhauji* to her husband’s sister and husband’s brother respectively. In *Old Stone Mansion* Vahini makes use of these terms to refer her brother in law as ‘Sudhirbhauji’ (2009:137) and ‘Prabha-vansa’(2009:167) to her

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sister in law. The use of the term ‘sister’ or ‘brother’ implies that the hearer has an edge over the speaker and (s) he has the right to advise the speaker.

Whilst expressing concern for the addressee sometimes indirect references are made. For instance, in Indian culture, instead of calling his own wife directly, a person will refer her as the mother of his child. Similarly a woman will refer her husband as *He* or the father of her child. In *Old Stone Mansion* we come across such indirect references.

BHASKAR: So? They haven't come, have they? Your darling brother- in-law and sister-in-law ? (Act I, Sec 1)

ANJALI: Speak to your brother. It's not for me to say. Whatever he decides... (Act I, Sec 2)

AAI: My dear, even when He was alive, I didn't have the power to give anything to anybody. Now I am altogether different. (Act II, Sec 2)

While conversing with his wife i.e. Vahini, the expressions ‘brother-in-law’ and ‘sister-in-law’ are used by Bhaskar to refer his own Brother Sudhir and his wife Anjali. He calls them in this way from his own wife / Vahini's point of view. While talking to Prabha Anjali calls her own husband as ‘Your brother’. She takes into account Prabha's point of view. Aai refers Vyankatesh, her husband, as He. This indirect way of referring the family members is one of the distinct features of politeness in Indian languages.

In Elkunchwar's *Old Stone Mansion* Ranju, Bhaskar's daughter elopes with a teacher, to Mumbai. In Indian context, if a girl in the family elopes with someone, it brings stigma on the family status. In Deshpande family Ranju, Bhaskar's daughter elopes with her teacher to Mumbai. Sudhir brings Ranju back from Mumbai. Bhaskar feels in debt of Sudhir for saving him as well as their family from social disgrace. Following interactions take place between them at the moment.

BHASKAR: Sudhir, how can I ever repay you for what you've done?

SUDHIR: Let's just forget it, Bhau. It's over and done with.

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BHASKAR: The younger brother has become the elder and the elder younger today.

SUDHIR: We have found Ranju. Nothing else matters.

(Act 2, Sec. III, p 192)

The dialogue reflects Bhaskar's helplessness. Sudhir's sympathetic and cooperative attitude towards Bhaskar and his family strengthens the bond of brotherhood and the sense of togetherness in family.

### **NEGATIVE POLITENESS STRATEGIES**

Conventional Indirectness, Being Pessimistic and Minimizing Imposition and Use of Deferential Modes are the negative politeness strategies applied to the dialogues in the play. Politeness principles are used to control the linguistic ways to maintain and consolidate our social relations. The addresser uses strategies so that the addressee's freedom of action and freedom of imposition will be honoured. Negative politeness is redressive action. It is addressed to the addressee's negative face. Negative politeness is oriented mainly towards a partial satisfaction of the addressee's negative face. The concept of negative face centers around a person's basic want to maintain claims of territory and self-determination. Hence, negative politeness is characterized by self-effacement, formality, and restraint.

In indirect politeness two or more interpretations are made by the co-conversationalists. The relation between the speaker and the hearer and the amount of shared knowledge cannot be identified. In the play under conditions characters make use of indirectness to convey what they have in mind. The intentions which occur in speaker's mind may have different meanings, and the addresser may or may not interpret it in the same manner

In *Old Stone Mansion*, one night Sudhir and Anjali are sitting on a stone ledge in the open yard. They exchange following utterances.

ANJALI: How hot it is! It gets hot as soon as the rain stops.

SUDHIR: Sit near me.

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ANJALI: Don't get ideas.

SUDHIR: Ideas?

ANJALI: What else? Out here in the open ...

SUDHIR: I wasn't even thinking that way. It's all in your mind. (Pause.)

ANJALI: We are in mourning. You should remember that.

SUDHIR: Have we stopped eating and drinking because we are in mourning? Hunh?

ANJALI: Don't get so desperate. (Laughs.)

SUDHIR (*fuming*): What's making you grin?

ANJALI: Ranju is also another abnormal creature.

SUDHIR: How does Ranju come into this?

ANJALI: You might think she's stupid, but she's interested in things she shouldn't be at her age. (Pause.) She was asking me about birth control today.

SUDHIR: You should have shut her up. The *bhaitaad*. (Act 2, Sc. 2)

In the aforesaid conversation Sudhir's expression "Sit near me" is taken by Anjali as a call for romance. She avoids it by using the expression "Don't get ideas". The word "ideas" is indirectly referred here for romance. Anjali reminds him that they are in mourning as Sudhir's father has passed away, so he should control himself and behave properly. Further she informs Sudhir about Ranju's abnormal behaviour. Her indirect expression "she's interested in things she shouldn't be at her age" shows that Ranju is taking interest in the things related with sexual intercourse which is not appropriate at her age. Ranju is already attracted to her teacher. Probably she has established physical relations with him so she makes enquiry about birth control to Anjali. Sudhir's utterance "You should have shut her up. The *bhaitaad* shows that in Indian culture things related with sexual acts and physical relations are not discussed directly and openly. Generally, ladies avoid referring to birth,



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death, pregnancy, menstruation, sexual and excretory activities and semen. In the families children are not supposed to discuss such issues with parents or other family members and vice versa.

The strategy of being pessimistic gives redress to H's negative face by explicitly expressing doubt that the conditions for appropriateness of S's speech act obtain. As we have discussed earlier negative politeness is oriented mainly towards a partial satisfaction of the addressee's negative face. The concept of negative face centers around a person's basic want to maintain claims of territory and self-determination.

In *Old Stone Mansion* by Elkunchwar Deshpande family is waiting for Sudhir and Anjali. They are in mourning as Vyankatesh has passed away. Bhaskar the elder son out of his restlessness makes following statement.

BHASKAR: So? They haven't come, have they? Your darling brother-in-law and sister-in-law?

VAHINI: Chandu-bhauji says the bus got cancelled. Wonder if they're stranded somewhere.

BHASKAR (*sarcastically*): Of course he'll come. Full of love that he is!

(Act 1, Sec i)

Bhaskar's cynical attitude with negative question tag shows that neither he nor listener i.e. his wife can do anything if Sudhir doesn't turn up. In Indian languages, the tag particle, such as *nā* in Hindi, attaches itself to a positive or negative statement. Tag forms express solidarity toward the addressee, encourage participation, soften a criticism or disagreement, or express politeness (Holmes 1995). It shows their helplessness to control the situation. Vahini's subjunctive (stating possibility and not the fact) statement, 'Wonder if they're stranded somewhere' is also showing pessimism. In this strategy As Brown and Levinson (2010:136) mention the speaker chooses one of two courses. Either he wants to definitely convey the assumptions that H is unlikely to do the act A, and so he asserts it, or he wants to convey that he is unsure whether H can do A, so he questions it. The strategies are mutually exclusive, because if S questions the improbability of H's doing A, he wouldn't be assuming it.

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Deference is a double sided phenomenon which finds manifestation either in the lowering of the self or the raising of the other or both at a time. Yule (2011) calls it ‘formal politeness’ in which compliments, greetings and modes of address or honorifics are included. This type of politeness of raising the other is generally used in Indian fiction. Conversations are a constant flow of verbal interactions in which compliments are a part of making the other person happy, and become more cooperative. This strategy is used by various characters in the selected play.

According to Ashok Thorat (2002), there are different kinds of classification of compliments: face to face compliments and in absentia compliments. We praise somebody in front of us because we want to satisfy his desire to be liked and approved of. When people are admired and their qualities are publicized and advertised, they feel elated and the complimenter and the complimentee are glued together in a bond of social solidarity camaraderie. In *Old Stone Mansion* we come across one such example of deference. In one of the situations of family gossip Vahini and Sudhir show admiration for each other’s children- Parag and Abhay respectively. The dialogue is as follows.

VAHINI: How he admires Abhay – his looks, his clothes, the way he plays cricket! When Abhay tops his class in Bombay this boy dances happily here. That’s how love works.

SUDHIR: Abhay’s also very fond of him.

VAHINI: That’s natural. There’s just two of them, brothers. They have only each other. If your letter says ‘blessings to Raghoba’, that’s enough to send him into ecstasy. None of us is allowed to call him ‘Raghoba’. That name’s strictly for Sudhir-kaka. For us he’s ‘Parag’. That’s how it is. How’s Abhay?

SUDHIR: Totally changed in the last here years. You’ll never recognize him if you see him now. He’s not seventeen yet, but he’s almost six feet tall.

VAHINI: Has he put on any flesh, though?

SUDHIR: All muscle. He can’t bear to miss even one day at the gym.

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VAHINI: That's wonderful. And he's got Anjali's looks. That's good too. Why didn't you bring him along? If he becomes too much of a Bombaywallah, he'll have no feelings left for us.

SUDHIR: Oh no. He walks about this place all the time. Especially about Parag. Parag taught him to swim in the pond here. That's a strong memory. They used to run riot all over the wada, remember? (Act 1, Sec iii)

As we have discussed above everyone likes if they are praised by somebody. Both Vahini and Sudhir's sense of respect towards their children make them feel elated and their bond of social solidarity is strengthened.

### **INTERPRETATION OF (IM)POLITE DIALOGUE AND CHARACTERIZATION**

So far we have discussed generally the linguistic work on how speakers are polite in their verbal productions and how they mitigate impoliteness linguistically. According to Carter and Simpson (2005) one of the advantages of application of linguistic theories to literature is that they can provide interpreters with a descriptive framework against which they can assess their claims. In this section the focus will be on the approach to politeness/impoliteness in dramatic texts, especially to the issue of how politeness/impoliteness helps us understand a fictional character. Culpeper (1998: 83) suggests that the choice of an (im)politeness strategy of a particular character helps to increase our understanding of the personality of this character. More specifically, it helps us to understand, (1) how characters position themselves relative to other characters, and (2) how they manipulate others in pursuit of their goals' (1998: 83). Due to the limitation of the study only selected characters are studied in the light of (im)politeness theory. In *Old Stone Mansion* Prabha is a revolting character. Her speech reveals her attitude. Her comment on the situation and on various characters shows her anxiety.

PRABHA: When father dies, the daughter must look out for herself.

SUDHIR: What do you lack?

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PRABHA: I must live off whatever crumbs you brothers throw on me now. You're all right. You'll take your share and go off to Bombay. But let me tell you Sudhir, it's not even five days since Tatyaji died. Five days. And Vahini has changed already. The house keys moved instantly to her into her keep. And Aai went instantly into the shadows of the backroom. When Tatyaji was alive, you couldn't hear Vahini's footfall on the Verandah. But within five days her orders are heard way outside the wada.

(Act I, Sec i)

In traditional Indian culture a girl is considered burden in the family till she gets married. A girl becomes guest to her family once she is married. A girl is considered to be dependent on her father till she gets married. After marriage she is dependent on her husband and in her old age she has to depend on her son. In *Old Stone Mansion* after Tatyaji's death Prabha feels there is no one to look after her. Her brothers are married and they have their own families to look after. Prabha, the only sister of Bhaskar and Sudhir feels insecure. She doesn't like the fact that after Tatyaji, Vahini centralizes everything in her hand so she complains it to Sudhir.

In one of the nights after dinner the Deshpandes were discussing over their family matters. Bhaskar begins the issue of Prabha's marriage. Prabha blames her brothers for not getting her a suitable husband and for not allowing her to learn further after matriculation. She points out that her brothers are responsible for the frugal status in which she lives. She is a girl who doesn't like to get suppressed under any unsuitable situation. She doesn't believe in patriarchal system and has a strong desire of studying higher classes.

BHASKAR: That's how it is. Now didn't I try my best to find a match for Prabha? But nothing worked at first. When it did, Prabha turned up her nose?

PRABHA: They were all bullocks off the farm. Not a single educated man amongst them.

BHASKAR: Two of your brothers are farmers as well.

PRABHA: I wanted an educated man.

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BHASKAR: Why would an educated man marry you?

PRABHA (*almost shouting*): That's right! First stop me from studying and then blame me for it! Weren't you, as brothers, responsible in any way? You, Sudhir. Every time you came here you said you'd look for a match in Bombay. You never found time for me did you? You couldn't even manage a simple thing like sending me books. Don't think I'm panting to get married. It's done with now. It's too late. But don't think that'll stop me from holding a mirror up to your faces.

Bhaskar and Sudhir have a wordy combat over the issue of expenditure on the thirteenth and fourteenth day rituals and to get money for the same they decide to sell the portion of the property which is in Aai's name. Prabha gets angry at this solution. She feels that Bhaskar and Sudhir earn money so they should bear the expenditure and should not think of selling property which is in Aai's name. She reacts in the following way which reveals her revolting temperament.

PRABHA: My dear able-bodied brothers! Why don't you wear bangles?

Selling the morsel from your mother's mouth! And these two women, pretending as if they don't know what's going on. (Act II, Sec i)

Aai is compassionate, loving, sympathetic and a patient woman. When Vyenkatesh, her husband dies, she feels alone. She is a woman who is born and brought up in traditional rural life where patriarchal system has a strong hold in family and social structure. She has never disobeyed her husband nor argued over any matter. She even doesn't feel irritated towards her mother-in-law, Dadi. She believes in patriarchal system and feels that all family members should obey the elder males of the family.

Chandu is working in the family like a servant. Aai is very much worried about her. Aai asks Chandu to eat something outside. Vahini pokes her nose in and behaves impolitely with Aai.

AAI (*calling him as he passes*): Chandu ...

CHANDU: Coming

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AAI: Have you brought the groceries?

CHANDU: No, Not yet.

AAI: Have you eaten anything since morning?

CHANDU: No.

AAI: Have a few bites, son. Parched rice, or something. How long will you starve?

*(Vahini suddenly emerges from inside)*

VAHINI (*voice slightly edgy, raised*): Nobody else has eaten either.

AAI: Yes dear. I only said it because he was fasting yesterday, Thursday.

He didn't eat at night.

VAHINI: Was he the only one fasting? Now give up all these worries,

please. Really!

The dialogue reveals that Aai is now in the backdrop. In Indian family system mother-in-law is always given a due respect by the daughter(s)-in law. In fact a daughter-in-law has to show due respect to all family members of her in-laws though these members happen to be younger to her. She is supposed to speak very politely. In this piece of interaction Vahini's impolite statements 'Nobody else has eaten either' and 'Was he the only one fasting? Now give up all these worries, please. Really 'show her disrespect for Aai. She insults Aai directly and Chandu indirectly.

As Culpeper (2002:83) mentions in dramatic terms impoliteness is particularly interesting because it generates the disharmony and conflict between characters which generates audience's interest and often moves the plot forward.

## CONCLUSION

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Literature makes use of language as its medium. Dialogue analysis to reveal the theme, characters, plot development, aesthetic beauty and pleasures in the form of language is one of the commonly practiced methods in literary research. However the applied aspect of linguistics or pragmatics is less practiced. Politeness is no doubt the universal phenomena, but it changes from one culture/linguistic group or community to another. Theories from linguistics or pragmatics can open the new vistas of studying literature of varied culture specificity.

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