

### A STUDY OF SPEECH ACTS IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

PROF. SHRINIVAS IPPALPALLI

Waghire College,  
Saswad Tal.Purandhar,Dist.Pune

#### ABSTRACT

*The present paper keenly studies the utterances used in Arundhati Roy's famous novel 'The God of Small Things' from pragmatic point of view in general and speech act point of view in particular. It focuses on the analysis of Speech Act Theory from this novel. This paper is mainly devoted to the analysis of the speech acts by applying Searle's typology of speech acts. In this paper, attempt has been made to analyze the five categories of speech acts by J.R. Searle. It also visualizes the social, religious and cultural structure of the small village Ayemenem in Kerala. In this novel the characters are not just speaking something, but there is an intention behind their saying something. There are specific goals and intentions of the speakers in the novel*

**Keywords-** Pragmatics, Speech Act Theory, Utterances, Illocutionary Force, Perlocutionary Effect, Discourse, Speech Situation, Context

#### INTRODUCTION

Speech act theory is one of the useful and effective tools in interpreting the literary discourse especially fictional discourse. The fact of the matter is that a novelist while writing his or her novel tends to use language suitable to the characters moving in the socio-cultural milieu. Therefore, studying the utterances of the characters using the principles of pragmatics in general and the speech act theory in particular is a novel way of discovering a new meaning and eventually arriving at an authentic interpretation. The present research paper is aimed at studying the novel 'The God Of Small Things' taking into consideration the typology of speech acts as advocated by J. R. Searle. The Indian Novel in English offers the reader insight into the social, economic and cultural aspects including the interpersonal relationship between the interlocutors. Modern writer like Arundhati Roy, has carved her niche on the literary map of Modern Indian writing in English. She is the novelist of the third generation of the writers writing in Indian English giving a new dimension to the existing body of literature in Indian writing in English. The language used by her is unique and reflects the elements of modernity and the process of globalization. Speech act theory deals with almost all the aspects of linguistic communication. When the speaker conveys something, he or she always intends to have an effect on the listeners, so that the listener can recognize the speaker's intention behind the use of the linguistic expressions. In a novel the author tries to make clear his/her intentions through the utterances uttered by the characters. The best way to interpret and comprehend a novel is to treat the utterances as speech acts.

#### 1. SIGNIFICANCE OF PRAGMATIC APPROACH IN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS:

The origin of the word 'discourse' is from Latin 'discursus' which denotes 'conversation or speech' and it refers to wide area human concerns. The different views of the important factors of discourse such as its structures, its functionality, its social role, its communicative features in its immediate context and culture and so on.

According to David Crystal (1992:25), "Discourse is a continuous stretch of language larger than a sentence, often constituting a coherent unit such as a sermon, argument, joke, or narrative". Thus, the fictional discourse can be looked at as a sociolinguistic event. As such, an exploration into the socio-cultural context of a literary text is inevitable. To be precise, the novels can be fully understood with the help of pragmatic approach. In pragmatics, speech act theory occupies central position. A speech act analysis of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* therefore, will pave the way for use of pragmatics in studying the most popular form of literature i.e. novel. Speech Act Theory if applied to a fictional discourse helps the reader arrive at authentic interpretation. The socio-cultural context in which the characters of the novel are placed can be best understood through the analysis of speech acts. In addition, interpersonal relations do play an important role in analyzing the speech acts. Utterances of different characters that contribute in creating the cultural reality can be best understood against the backdrop of speech act theory. The socio-cultural factors play a vital role in pragmatic interpretation of literary discourse. Searle rightly says (1969:16)- "Speaking language is performing speech acts, acts such as making statements, giving commands, asking questions, making promises, and so on." As such, the context of utterances occupies central position in pragmatics. Therefore, the study of pragmatics is vital from the point of view of analyzing, interpreting and judging the work of art.

## 2. ANALYSIS OF SELECTED SPEECH ACTS

A main virtue of speech act approach to literature is that it offers the same model as we employ in our daily communicative activities. Speaker takes full advantage of contextual elements such as time and place in which language is used. Author does not directly address his message towards the reader, rather he communicates his intention indirectly through the characters. Therefore for a better understanding of utterances, the reader should look at them both from character's point of view as well as authorial point of view. Behind each utterance in the novel is an intention or a network of intentions. From the authorial point of view, each illocutionary act is designed with a set of purpose in mind to serve a function. Speech acts in a novel vary in terms of their functions and significance in the larger context of the novel. The analysis of speech acts reveals to us the hidden intentions of the characters as well as the authorial intentions. Let us see how utterances are used in this novel by various characters. They are analyzed under Searle's typology of speech acts. They are 1) Assertives or Representatives 2) Directives 3) Commissives 4) Expressives and 5) Declaratives.

### 2.1 First let us see Assertive speech act example:

*Baby Kochamma*: "We should keep an eye on him. If he starts this union business in the factory....." (P.81) Assertives represent the speaker's belief of something that can be evaluated to be 'true or false' and commit the speaker in varying degrees to something being the case, i.e. to the truth of the expressed proposition (Searle, 1979:12). Here, Baby Kochamma utters this sentence while all the family members were going to receive Margaret Kochamma, ex-wife of Chacko, at the Cochin airport. She saw Velutha in the communist party march when they stopped at the railway signal. She does not like the behavior of Velutha, a worker in their pickles factory. She always criticizes him. The illocutionary force of this utterance is to criticize him. It has perlocutionary effect on the family members sitting in the car. Kochamma suggests implicitly that they should keep watch on Velutha. Kochamma's concern is reflected here. Thus, the addresser's sincerity helps execute the intended act successfully.

**2.2** Let us see example of Directive speech act: Here, the speaker tries to make the hearer do something, with such words as: ask, beg, challenge, command, dare, invite, insist, request etc.

*Inspector Thomas Mathew to Baby Kochamma: "Where is the rape-victim's complaint?"* (P.314) In this example, we see that Inspector Thomas Mathew is asking Baby Kochamma about the rape-victim's complaint. Baby makes false allegations against Velutha that he raped her niece. The illocutionary force of this utterance is to make enquiry about rape allegations, the rape victim's statement. The perlocutionary effect is on Baby Kochamma. She tries to explain why her niece could not come to police station.

**2.3** Let us see example of Commissive speech act: Here the speaker commits himself/herself to a future course of action by using verbs such as: guarantee, pledge, promise, swear, vow, undertake, warrant etc.

**Mammachi :** *"If I find you on my property tomorrow I'll have you castrated like the pariah dog that you are!"* (P.284)

Here we see that Mammachi is very angry with Velutha when she came to know about Velutha's illicit relationship with Ammu, her divorced daughter. She threatens to castrate Velutha if he does not leave her property the next day. Here the illocutionary force is to threaten Velutha. Castration is not in his best interest and he should understand it. Mammachi knows it and she wants him to know that his castration is not in his best interest. She will undertake his castration if he does not leave her premises. Here the perlocutionary effect is Velutha understands the grim situation and leaves the place immediately.

**2.4** Let us see example of Expressive speech act: they express the psychological state of the speaker's mind. For example, to apologize, appreciate, congratulate, deplore, detest, regret, thank, welcome etc. **Mammachi:** *"He can't help having a Man's Needs"* (P.168)

Here Mammachi is supporting Chacko's libertine relationships with the women in the factory, but had ceased to be hurt by them. When Baby Kochamma brought up the subject, Mammachi became tense and tight-lipped. The illocutionary force of this utterance is indirectly supporting the feelings of her son, Chacko. The perlocutionary effect is, Baby Kochamma surprisingly accepted this explanation.

**2.5** There are very few examples of Declarative speech act in this novel.

### CONCLUSION

The present paper tries to recognize the usefulness of speech act theory to facilitate and inculcate the higher order of thinking skills and to develop interpretative mind of the reader. Speech act theory is a very powerful instrument to interpret fictional discourse and it can be applied to the masterpieces of the world famous novels, plays and short stories. By employing the important theories of pragmatics we can better understand the social and cultural milieu in which the characters move. The writers make use of culture-specific terms while writing novels or plays. Therefore, using the principles of pragmatics is inevitable for understanding the cultural aspects of the society reflected in the work of art.

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