

**Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session:*
Formation of Mental, Social & Physical Contexts through Proverbs**

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Abstract

Conceptualization of the world around us is the result of what we see, what we perceive and what makes us believe in it. While acquiring language, we unintentionally construct the world around us in our mind by the inputs of language. Proverbs, as part of language input also create the world of their own around themselves whenever they are used. Utterances are the source points from which hearer of the utterances tries to construct intended meaning of these utterances and enable them to visualize an image to understand them. It is very interesting to know how proverbs build mental, social and physical scenes in the minds of people involved in communication situation. The present paper studies the proverbs used in Vijay Tendulkar's play *Silence! The Court is in Session* from Jef Verschueren's model of contextual correlates to find out how mental, social and physical contexts are built through these proverbs.

Keywords: Vijay Tendulkar, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, proverbs, mental context, social context, physical context, contextual correlates

Introduction

Literature portrays society, and one of the aims of literature is to present an image of social, cultural, historical, political, and traditional aspects of the society. Poets, dramatists and novelists use language resourcefully to achieve portrayal of various aspects of society. Conceptualization of the world around us is the result of what variety of information is communicated to us. While understanding literature, we inadvertently create perceptions in our mind from the inputs of language. Drama as a genre of literature has a lot to communicate while being performed or read. Dramatists have to pen each and every detail to achieve the desired dramatic effect upon the audience. Communication in dramatic text is different than that of other types of texts as it has performance components as well as dialogic components noticeably mentioned in it. This type of communication in drama enriches the dramatic text for innumerable enquiries in it.

As stated by Jef Verschueren, our “linguistic choices are contextually anchored” (75), likewise our communicative choices are contextually and culturally anchored which include both the linguistic and non-linguistic choices (Jagadale 179). As a medium of communication, drama brings about scholarly challenges for its spectators, making them a community that understands the dramatic text and performance based on their own communicative experiences. Therefore, it becomes inevitable to enquire the possibilities rendered by the playwrights for deciphering communicative choices used in the plays. Communication in drama takes place on several levels. The communicative choices made by the dramatists and the audiences should match to the extent that ultimate end should meet i.e. appropriate interpretation of the text and performance. As rightly pointed out by Verschueren, “The apparent unboundedness of context could indeed have a dizzying effect. This is why the Gricean option (see section 1.3) to define meaning - after introducing a clearly pragmatic perspective - entirely in terms of the individual utterer’s intentionality, was so easily adopted as a standard for many years. It gave a false impression of manageability. However, the fear of an uncontrollable, ever-widening, extra-linguistic background is based on the misguided view of context as purely a reality ‘out there’. In fact, *contexts are generated in language use*, and thereby restricted in various ways” (108-109). Taking into account the importance of these communicative choices, an attempt has been made to study the proverbs used in Vijay Tendulkar’s *Silence! The Court is in Session* and to observe how mental, social and physical contexts are triggered through the use of these proverbs.

India is recognized as one of the largest English book-producing countries in the world. Creative writing in English is taken to be an important aspect of literary convention in India. Indeed, as stated by Iyengar, “Of course, it is Indian literature, even as the work of a Thoreau or a Hemingway is American literature. But Indian literature comprises several literatures- Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Kannada, Maithili, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, not to mention Sanskrit, for people continue to write in it though the readers are few and far between- and Indian writing in English is but one of the voices in which India speaks, it is a new voice, no doubt, but it is as much Indian as the others” (03).

Similarly, many scholars claim that Indian writing symbolizes a new form of Indian culture. The Indian writers in English write all about their experiences and views which are not foreign but very much Indian. Indian writing in English seems to be influenced by flavour of local languages which is a particular feature of Indian literature in English. The contextualization of local language can be clearly seen in Indian writing in English e.g. the literal translation of local idiomatic and proverbial expressions. As a result of this, Indian writing in English has flourished over the period of time and provided the world with an exposure to Indian experience of literary taste.

Vijay Tendulkar is one of the literary figures in Indian Literature and a prominent figure of Marathi theatre is well known for his dramas *Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe* (1967), *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972), and *Sakharam Binder* (1972). As a creative Marathi writer he has penned twenty-eight full length plays, twenty-four one-act plays, and eleven children plays. Besides a distinguished dramatist, he is well-known for his literary essays, political journalism, screen and television writings, translated works and social commentaries. Many of his plays have the sources taken from real-life incidents or social upheavals, which throw clear light on severe realities.

In the contextual correlates adaptability model put up by Jef Verschueren referring to figure 3.1, it is stated that “Utterer and interpreter are presented as focal points because the contextual aspects of the physical, social and mental worlds (which are not strictly to be separated either- hence the broken lines) do not usually start to play a role in language use until they have somehow been activated by the language users’ cognitive processes” (77). The model proposed by Jef Verschueren takes into account the linguistic aspect of the contextual correlates adaptability. The same model can be applied in the study of proverbs used in literature, and speculations can be made about how our mental, social and physical contexts are constructed through the use of proverbial expressions in literature. Therefore, formation of mental, social and physical contexts through proverbs in Vijay Tendulkar’s *Silence! The Court is in Session* has been investigated in the present paper.

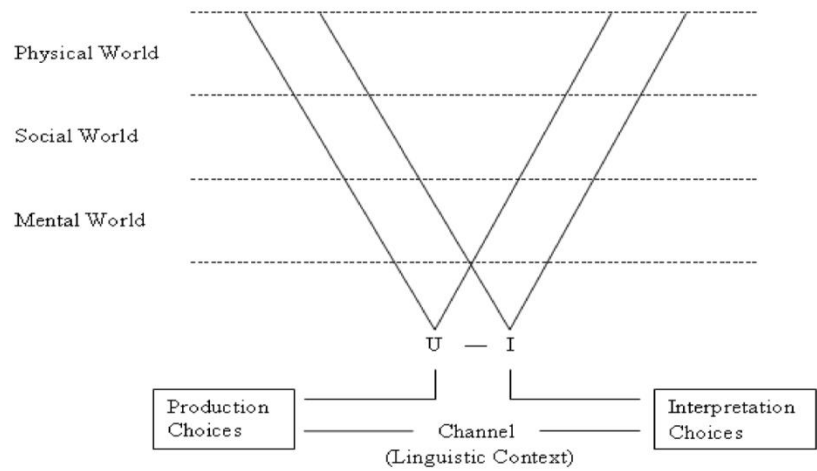


Fig. 3.1 Contextual correlates of adaptability (Verschueren 1999:76)

The play *Silence! The Court is in Session* opens with Leela Benare and Mr. Samant’s entrance into a village common hall where they plan to perform a court trial as a part of their social awareness through performance. One by one, all the actors enter the hall. Some of them

inform that they may not be able to attend the performance. As a result, they decide to replace those absent actors with the people available to them for the time being. All decide not to try the same case they have been practicing for the last seven performances. They decide to take a different topic with some social importance. They decide to have a burning issue of infanticide. Ms. Benare is accused of the crime and a trial is carried out in mock court against her. The mock court room is arranged, and Ms. Benare is put in the culprit's wooden dock. In mock trial, her private life seemed to be exposed perhaps intentionally. Thus, trial court becomes real court for Ms. Benare as each and every detail of her private life is opened. During the interaction, characters use different proverbs in relation to the case which forms mental, social and physical contexts. The use of proverbs by characters let the other characters and audience construct these contexts.

Formation of Mental Context through Proverbs

The mental context pertains to the psychological attributes of an utterer of the utterance. In this play, we find various occasions on which certain proverbs are used by the characters which enable us to probe into various contexts. As it is said, usage of proverbs exhibits the psychological features such as persona, sentiments, viewpoints, wishes, inspiration, objectives, etc. of characters in the play. Kashikar uses the proverb "Best efforts bring best result" (Tendulkar 26). The use of this proverb facilitates audience to probe into Mr. Kashikar's psychology. It elucidates that, for Mr. Kashikar, the effort of mock court trail is worthy, and they should promote such efforts without any condition. Mr. Kashikar's intention is revealed through this proverb that they must put in hundred percent efforts to achieve the target. The other characters are also convinced that what they are doing is worth the effort. In this way, the use of proverb exposes an attempt of convincing & motivation to others.

The accusation against Ms. Benare was under trial and Mr. Sukhatme, the advocate, starts his speech to support his argument by using the proverb "Be thy mother as a God" (Tendulkar 30). Mr. Sukhatme while describing the nobility of women argues that mother is the only person whom we consider next to god and the culprit's act of infanticide is a blot on the character of women. Through this proverb, we come to know that Mr. Sukhatme tries to construct his argument in such a way that everybody is convinced that the crime committed by Ms. Benare is severe and she should be punished. The act of infanticide is contradictory to what the society believes in. To everyone's belief mother is equal to god and killing one's own child is not an act of god. Thus, it creates mental image of woman as sacred. In addition, Mr. Sukhatme is reminded of one more proverb related to motherhood by Mr. Kashikar "Mother and the motherland both are even higher than heaven." (Tendulkar 30). Mr. Kashikar uses this proverb to remind & motivate Mr. Sukhatme that he is making a very good ground for the mock trial. It demonstrates Mr. Kashikar's psychological support to Mr. Sukhatme.

While cross-questioning Mr. Ponkshe, he reveals some personal facts about Ms. Benare's life. He is about to disclose the name of Ms. Benare's infant. Everyone is eager to know this and out of curiosity Mrs. Kashikar could not hold herself back. At this juncture, Mr. Kashikar advises Mrs. Kashikar to be patient the truth will come out shortly. To suggest this, he uses the proverb "The cat'll be out of the bag soon, anyway" (Tendulkar 60). Through this proverb, Mr. Kashikar tries to suggest Mrs. Kashikar that the moment has come when truth comes out and Mrs. Kashikar should have patience. Thus, it becomes clear that Mr. Kashikar wants everyone to be patient.

Mr. Kashikar met one of the reputed persons in the locality. He happens to be the president of the school in which Ms. Benare is working. Mr. Kashikar hears him telling someone that such teacher should be expelled from the school. Mr. Sukhatme picks this point to support his argument and uses the proverbs "Tit for tat. As you sow, so shall you reap" (Tendulkar 69). By using these two proverbs he tries to suggest everyone that people will meet the same fortune as per their deeds. He supports his argument by using these proverbs. Adding to his arguments, he aptly quotes the proverb "Woman is not fit for independence." (Tendulkar 71) to show what will happen if women are given freedom. He suggests that the observations of society made by wise people who have formed these proverbs are appropriate till today. In this way, we come to know the thought process of people in society.

Counter arguing Mr. Sukhatme Ms. Benare questions the very existence and purpose of life. She uses a modified version of Mr. Sukhatme's proverb "Life is not worthy of life" (Tendulkar 73). She questions the purpose of life as to why people talk about idealism and do not pay attention to the predicaments of others. What she has been through is ignored and made a victim of the crime she unintentionally committed. She is not the only one who is the culprit but others are also equally responsible for the crime but everything is posed on women and men are set free from all charges. Therefore, she said life is not commendable of life itself as it is bound by what others say.

Formation of Social Context through Proverbs

The social context reflected through proverbs in the play pertains to the socio-cultural dimensions. As far as social aspect is concerned, proverbs in the play have a lot more to convey about socio-cultural aspects in the play. The proverbs show society's observations and functioning. The mock court trail is under progress, and the very purpose of the performance is to make society aware of the evil in society. Selection of the charge for mock court trail is praised by Mr. Kashikar that shows his concern for his own decision for the welfare of society. He says that he always does his best for social welfare by citing the proverb "Best efforts bring best result" (Tendulkar 26). The focal social element in the play is women. The way Ms. Benare

behaved is totally in contrast with what a woman socially and culturally is believed to be. Socio-culturally women are considered holy. The role of mother is even compared with god by the proverb “Be thy mother as a God” (Tendulkar 30). Motherhood is glorified by comparing the mother with the heaven in proverb “Mother and the motherland both are even higher than heaven” (30). The understood context in the play is that of imaginary and as the performance aims to create awareness in society, the proverbs which evoke social awareness had to be used. Therefore, as per the requirement of social context, proverbs are used in the play. Another aspect of social importance reflects through the proverb “The cat’ll be out of the bag soon, anyway” (Tendulkar 60). It expresses the view of society about nature of truth. We cannot hide the truth for long time. It will come out by any means, and the same thing happened in case of Ms. Benare in present situation. Ms. Benare did unlawful things for which she receives the punishment. She is about to be expelled from her job for her wrong actions. Socially unacceptable action upholds the consequences. This is clearly stated in proverb “Tit for tat. As you sow, so shall you reap” (Tendulkar 69). Traditionally, women are considered unfit for freedom in Indian context where men have been considered superior to women. Free nature of woman poses doubt about her character. It is mentioned in proverb “Woman is not fit for independence” (Tendulkar 71). Further, social burden is questioned by Ms. Benare as to why a person cannot live life as per his or her will. She suspects the hypocrisy by using a modified version of Mr. Sukhatme’s proverb, “Life is not worthy of life” (Tendulkar 73). As a result, we can say that proverbs in the play are socio-culturally loaded and state the socio-cultural norms of society.

Formation of Physical Context through Proverbs

According to Verschueren, physical context is marked by the use of reference points related to time and space (95). He also argues that, “The relativity of temporal and spatial references is primarily a function of the positioning of language users in the ‘world’. A lot of linguistic choice-making is dependent on properties of this positioning beyond the few lines sketched above in ‘pure’ temporal and spatial terms.” (Verschueren 100)

Likewise, proverbs fit into physical context beyond temporal and spatial references, yet they stand the taste of time and space. Sometimes, they are used with certain changes to fit into the context (Mieder x).

Proverbs are adaptable to the time and space as they are evolved throughout ages. Proverbs used in the play do not merely pertain to particular time and space, but they are universally applicable to the similar situation irrespective of time and space. The physical context reflected through the use of proverbs may not directly be related to absolute temporal and spatial references, but they do correspond to the physical context in the play. The mock court room is physical situation, and time of the mock drill is day time. As for Mr. Kashikar, in any

condition everyone must try to make the best is stated in the proverb “Best efforts bring best result” (Tendulkar 26) for the present circumstance hence, the proverb is applicable to all the situations where such circumstances occur.

In the present physical context, it’s the court trail which aimed at social welfare and therefore, it must achieve the aim. The physical context as said before is the court room, and arguments are at the core of court room. Mr. Sukhatme uses the proverb “Be thy mother as a God.” (Tendulkar 30) to make his arguments strong and to fit into the physical context i.e. court room of the accusation of infanticide. We even consider the mother to be equal to god. The proverb, “Mother and the motherland both are even higher than heaven” (30), has the comparison between the mother and heaven hence the aim of using this proverb is to glorify motherhood by this physical comparison of a person with a divine place.

Occasionally, proverbs literally activate different physical contexts and they relate to different physical attributes in the situation. Likewise, in the proverb “The cat’ll be out of the bag soon, anyway” (Tendulkar 60), truth is physically considered a cat which is hidden and it’s not patient enough to hide for a long time. Consequently, the bag is something that has covered the truth, and it will be uncovered shortly. The next two proverbs are used together & convey similar in meaning. They are: “Tit for tat. As you sow, so shall you reap” (Tendulkar 69).

These proverbs are used in the context where Ms. Benare is going to receive what she deserves as a result of her behaviour. Literally the proverb pertains to the physical world of plantation. In the play it shows that Ms. Benare performed an illegal act and as the consequence of which she is going to suffer. The way Ms. Benare behaved is not acceptable in the socio-cultural setting universally and at the moment particularly. Therefore, it is argued that freedom to women leads to loss of culture. Mr. Sukhatme argues this with the proverb “Woman is not fit for independence” (Tendulkar 71). In the present physical context, the proverb relates to Ms. Benare as she performed an unacceptable act. The physical observation has led to the formation of this proverb. Taking the above proverb, Ms. Benare poses a question about one’s desires. She uses a twisted proverb “Life is not worthy of life” (Tendulkar 73) to show futility of life if it is not lived as per one’s own wish. Particularly women in the present context are suppressed to have free opinion; as a result of this life is not worthy of life for them.

Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that proverbs enable us to create psychological, social and physical word picture and let us peek into what a person thinks, how society functions and which physical features are used to adapt these proverbs into or which proverbs can be used as per the need of the situation. The following observations are made while analyzing proverbs in the play.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:11 November 2018

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- The use of proverbs allows having psychological impact on the viewers and other characters. The act of convincing, motivating, advising, warning, and moralizing the characters is done through the use of proverbs thereby generating mental context.
- Socio-cultural aspects in the play are reflected through the use of proverbs. Social welfare, significance of womanhood and motherhood, social awareness, social and personal ethics are evoked through proverbs.
- Apparently, the physical context of the proverbs does not become clear but after deep probing, it becomes clear that even proverbs are used at the backdrop of a physical context and beyond the temporal and special references.

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:11 November 2018

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