CHAPTER VII
DISCOURSE SYMBOLS

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7.0 **Discourse - Meaning**

Discourse in general means a speech, a sermon, to converse and to utter. It is interactive and it implies length. According to Zelling S. Harrrls (1952), discourse is a combination of sentences. Discourse is also defined in terms of communicative functions. Discourse refers to the dynamic processes and procedures. For example, a sign-board with the utterance 'Speed Breakers Ahead' placed on the left corner of a road in its 'appropriate context' becomes a piece of discourse since it communicates a message to the users of the road. (Krishnaswamy, 101-102)

Discourse is not only a collection of sounds or symbols but a form of behaviour that is communicative and goal-directed. It is a simple process of information exchange between a sender and receiver. Each is equipped to code, decode, and transmit information through a common set of symbols. Discourse can express much more than that is stated. It is something more than transmission of verbal forms. it is not simply the transmission and interpretation of coded information, but it creates meaning. The meaning of the discourse symbols constitutes the inalterable conventions upon which the discourse depends. Since all discourse depends upon
such conventions, all discourse is at least partially fixed. (Clippinger, 1977: 10-12).

In human communication, there is a dialectical process of getting a balance between two opposing forces - the force that compels an individual to assume a social role, to accept a transindividual role which results in the modification of one's worldview in return for the common good; this is known as the 'cooperative-imperative'. In acting collectively we create structures and transform them. The tendency to adopt oneself to one's milieu, the tendency to coherence and to social, global structuring processes, the dynamic character of behaviour and modifying tendency of the structure of which any individual is a part, the developmental tendency of both individual and society, the processes of structuration and destructuration, the fact that there is no permanence to these structures which are not even fully formed because they are dynamic. All these factors and many more, are to be taken into account in the study of discourse. (Krishnaswamy, 110)

Different kinds of structure run through discourse structure and it is not possible to reduce them to a single type. One kind of structure is based on the fact that people take turns at speaking in most kinds of interaction, so that speech
is divided up into separate stretches spoken by different speakers. This turn-taking is a very highly skilled activity. It involves many kinds of behaviour as well as speech and all of which are coordinated with split-second timing and reacted to with great accuracy by other participants. One particular type of turn-taking structure is characterised by 'Adjacency pairs' - a type of utterance by one speaker which requires a particular type of utterance by another. The most obvious adjacency pair is a sequence of a question followed by an answer, but there are many others, such as greeting + greeting complaint + apology, summons + answer, invitation + acceptance and so on. (Hudson, 1980: 134)

A second type of structure in discourse is based on topic. This topic - based structure is hierarchical, in the sense that a given text should be analysable into successively smaller units on the basis of topic. For example, 'book' has a very clear hierarchical structure based on topic, with chapters as the largest units, sections as the next largest, then subsections, then paragraphs and finally sentences, all neatly delimited by one kind of typographic convention or another.

An analyst has traced the ways in which the topic has varied in the discourse from time to time, either by gradual
drift or by abrupt change. In the words of Harvey Sacks, one of the founders of Conversation Analysis:

"a general feature for topical organization is movement from topic to topic, not by a topic-close followed by a topic-beginning, but by a stepwise move, which involves linking up whatever is being introduced to what has just been talked about, such that, as far as anybody knows, a new topic has not been started, though we're far from wherever we began." (Ibid : 134-136)

A third type of discourse structure is based on the structure of the world - that is 'encyclopedic structure' which gives form to 'the current topic'. Now it is clear that there is no chance of reducing all these structures to a single type, and that the structures of discourse are complex mixtures of norms specific to speech and general knowledge of the world. (Ibid, 136)

There is enormous variation in what people say and do in different circumstances and there are number of criteria for the sources of that variation. For example, we would have to specify the roles of speakers and hearers, and their relationships, whether they were friends, strangers, young, old,
of equal or unequal status, and many other factors. All of these factors will have an influence on what is said and how it is said. (Brown & Yule, 1983 : 143)

In most conversational exchanges, it seems that the participants are, in fact, co-operating with each other. This principle, together with four maxims was first set out by Grice (1975) known as co-operative principle which is stated in the following way: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose of the talk exchange in which you are engaged." (Brown & Yule, 1983 : 31) The following are the supporting four maxims:

Quantity: Make your contribution as information as is required, but not more, or less, than is required.

Quality: Do not say that which you believe to be false or for which you lack evidence.

Relation: Be relevant.

Manner: Be clear, brief and orderly.

However, this general description of the normal expectations of conversations helps to explain a number of regular features in the way people say things. (Ibid)
Keenan and Schieffelin (1976: 380) emphasise that 'discourse topic' is not a simple noun phrase, but a proposition (about which some claim is made): In describing the discourse topic as the 'question of immediate concern', Keenan and Schieffelin appear to replace the idea of a single correct noun phrase as expressing the topic with the idea of a single correct phrase. The implication in their study is that there must be, for any fragment of conversational discourse, a single proposition (expressed as a phrase or sentence) which represents the discourse topic of the whole of the fragment. (Brown & Yule, 1983: 71)

In discourse, communication, understanding and interaction are maintained by actual mechanisms. Language and communication are by no means parallel concepts in discourse. One important implication of discourse analysis is as follows: One of the biggest linguistic conundrums of all is: how we understand what someone is talking about?. (Stubbs, 1983: 30)

Discourse is also defined in terms of reference, presupposition, implicature inference and coherence. Discourse describes what speakers and hearers are doing and not the relationship which exists between one sentence and another. (Brown & Yule, 1983: 27)
(a) **Reference:**

According to Lyons 'the relationship which holds between words and things is the relationship of reference: 'words refer to things'. He makes the following point: it is the speaker who refers: 'he invests the expression with reference by the act of referring'. Strawson's claims that "referring" is not something an expression does it is something that someone can use an expression to do. Thus in discourse reference is treated as an action on the part of the speaker.

(Brown & Yule, 1983 : 28)

(b) **Presupposition:**

The notion of presupposition required in discourse analysis is pragmatic presupposition, that is, 'defined in terms of assumptions the speaker makes about what the hearer is likely to accept without challenge'. Presuppositions are what is taken by the speaker to be the common ground of the participants in conversation.

(c) **Implicature:**

'Implicature' is the term used by Grice (1975) to account for what speaker can imply, suggest, or mean, as distinct from what the speaker literally says (Shukla, 2002 : 63).
That is, "the notion of implicature rests upon a distinction between what is actually said and what is implied (but not entailed) in saying what is said". (Lyons, 1977 : 592)

According to Grice, there are, in principle, two types of implicature - conventional and conversational. The former is determined by the conventional meaning of the words used, (Grice, 1975 : 44) whereas the latter is the result of a general principle of conversation plus a number of maxims which speakers would normally obey. (Shukla, 2002 : 63)

(d) Inference

One of the pragmatic concepts in discourse analysis is inference which plays a vital role in the exchange of information in conversation. Actually speaking, the hearer does not and cannot have direct access to what the speaker actually intends in producing an utterance, rather "he often has to rely on a process of inference to arrive at an interpretation for utterances or for the connections between utterances" (Brown & Yule, 1983 : 33) Thus, inference depends on the hearer's capability. (Shukla, 2002 : 66)

"Once one goes beyond the strictly factual considerations of 'who', 'what', and 'when', questions, the need for infer-
ence becomes very obvious. If 'how' and 'why' questions are asked, we immediately have to make what Warren et al. (1979) describe as 'elaborative' and 'evaluative' inferences (Brown & Yule, 1983: 268).

(e) Coherence

Coherence is one of the fundamental properties of discourse and a general principle in the interpretation of human interaction. It is local between sentences and global for paragraphs or whole discourses. It is a 'matter of content, rather than form' (Lyons, 1981: 199), a semantic concept which refers to the 'intra-textual' semantic relations (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 4). It is well-formedness and is to be described in terms of discourse relevance and discourse topic (Patil, 1994: 23-24). Coherence is a property not only of spoken interaction but also of narrative discourse. It combines separate linguistic units into stretches of meaningful discourse. As Leech and Short (1981: 243-44) point out, 'the units must be implicitly or explicitly' bound together; they must not be just a random collection of sentences. The connectivity of the elements of a text is essentially a matter of meaning and reference. (Patil, 1994: 23)
7.1 Discourse Symbols in Anita Desai

Discourse is also a socially interactive phenomenon. This social-interaction focuses generally on multi-source discourse development since it is 'interaction-oriented'. This brings in the notion of 'relevance'. The relationships that go into the concept of relevance are seen at various levels. (Krishna Swamy, 109) It is true in the case of a novel. For example, in the novel 'Where Shall We Go This Summer ?', the different sections and chapters of a novel contribute to the structuring principles of a novel, the introductory chapter has relevance to the concluding chapter; it is perceived in its relation to all other novels, and this is another aspect of relevance. Thus the relevance is important in the study of discourse as social interaction.

Discourse is a universal feature of fiction also. In discourse, conversants use two rules to guide their conversational interaction as they attempt to stay on a topic and make their contribution relevant. The local rule suggests that conversants should chain to the last part of their partner's utterance; the global rule suggest that they should extend the main idea of the partner's talk. (Patil, 1994 : 23) For example, in Desai's 'Where Shall We Go This Summer ?' the conversa-
tion among the characters is as follows:

"He treated me for my fits and boils with powdered pearls and rubies and charged nothing", praised a third in a voice of awe, as if laying offerings at an altar.

"I remember. Oh yes, yes, remember," they all murmured, hummed, sang and sank into shadows lumped on a wooden bench.

"Who has forgotten the well?" Mosses roared to rouse them again.

"The only well in Manori that gives sweet water?"

"Ah, the well, the well. We remember. We know." (PP. 11-12)

In discourse, language always occurs in some kind of context, including cognitive context in which past experience and knowledge is stored and drawn upon, cultural contexts consisting of shared meanings and world views. (Schiffrin, 1987 : 3-4) For example in Desai's 'Where Shall We Go this Summer?' the past becomes a psychic residue in Sita's "personal unconscious", the backdrop of her life, gives her the strength to leave her home for Manori island, where she thinks she would be able to live under a magic spell:
"She saw that island illusion as a refuge, a protection. It would hold her baby safely unborn, by magic. Then there would be the sea - it would wash the frenzy out of her. Perhaps the tides would lull the children, too into smoother, softer beings. The grove of trees would shade them and protect them." (P. 101)

Another assumption is that language is always communicative in discourse and communication occurs when a sender either gives, or gives off, information. For example, in 'Where Shall We Go This Summer?' the conversation among Moses and other characters is as follows:

"I was sent twenty rupees", he admitted. "I had to spend it on something."

"Twenty rupees! Who would send you a present like that - your mother-in-law?"

"My memsahib" reared Moses suddenly, putting an end to the titters scampering around the table.

"The memsahib is coming." (PP. 8-9)

The final assumption is that language is designed for communication, as Lyons (1977 : 638) states: "there is much in the structure of languages that can only be explained on the
assumption that they have developed for communication in face-to-face interaction." For example, in 'Where Shall We Go this Summer ?', communication is as follows:

"They're only playing", Menaka told her, censoriously enough but including her mother in her prim censure.

"That's no way of playing", Sita said, "Get up. Get up. Stop it." (PP. 43-44)

There are four discourse tasks which figure prominently in conversational story-telling: initiating the story, reporting events within the story, conveying the point of the story, accomplishing an action through the story. (Schiffrin, 1987 : 17) For example, in 'Where Shall We Go This Summer ?', the conversational story-telling is as follows:

"It was long ago they lived on Manori, Moses", Jamila said, placatingly. She leant against the wall, raised one horny food and scratched it reminiscently. Our children won't even remember."

"But we do, we do", sang Joseph and Ali and several others.

"Who has forgotten the father ?" Moses harangued them, but in a sing-song tone.
"Not us, not us", neighed the goats.

"He rid my house of snakes and scorpions and no one was bitten again", the words sang out." (PP. 10-11)

Discourse involves knowledge and meta-knowledge and these are constantly in flux, as are degrees of certainty and salience. (Schiffrin, 1987 : 28) For example, in 'Where Shall We Go This Summer ?', Sita who has been unable to come out of her egotistical self now gets self-knowledge:

"How could she tell, how decide ? Which half of her life was real and which unreal ? Which of her selves was true, which false ? All she knew was that there were two periods of her life, each in direct apposition to the other. Neither sea nor ------- disentangle." (P. 153)

Discourse has both non-linguistic structures (exchange and action) and linguistic structures. Speaker and hearer are related to each other, and to their utterances, in a participation framework. (Schiffrin, 1987 : 29) One such example, in 'Where Shall We Go This Summer ?', is as follows:

"Mad", he breathed in relief, understanding all in a stumbling access of clarity. "You've gone mad."

"I think", she said, going back to the suitcase and

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the filling of it, "What I'm doing is trying to escape from the madness here.

"Who is mad, here? In this house? What madness?" and he gestured towards the door that led into the bedroom." (P. 35)

The text is based on our expectations of what normally happens. In this phenomenon, the concept of a 'schema' has been used by many researchers. Many schemata are used in the interpretation of what we experience and what we hear or read about. (Brown & Yule, 1983: 147) For example, in "Where Shall We Go This Summer?", when Sita says that she will go to Manori island, the children and husband Raman don't have to be told what is normally found in a island. They already have a 'island' schema "a lone soda water shop under a clump of toddy palms, broken bullock cart in front of it, the everchanging sky was flowering into a sunset radiance - the piled clouds, with the sun setting somewhere within their hearts, casting a light of fluid gold across the western sky." (P. 20)

One particular kind of schema is a 'script'. A script is essentially a dynamic schema, in which a series of conventional actions takes place. On the basis of our script, we would

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be able to say a number of things about the scene and events briefly in the short text. For example, if we have the version of a 'Drinking in a Tea Shop' script, from Desai's 'Where Shall We Go This Summer ?', and if the novel does not have this information, we can assume like the following:

"Wrapping his brilliant lungi more closely, more attractively about his hips, went into the tea shop on the beach to which a transister radio allured him by its trilling songs, so ripe with sensuous promise. He sat amongst jars of pink biscuits and cream horns and calendars and drank sweet tea out of a thick glass. He was served respectfully." (P. 7)

Discourse symbol is one of the devices of Anita Desai. She has used two types of discourse symbols - Dialogues and Situations. To give immediacy and dramatic effect to the scene described, Desai makes use of discourse symbols. The past events are described as if taking place in our presence.

7.2 **Dialogues**

'Dialogue' means conversation. It is a formal / informal, talk / discussion between two persons, groups or countries, especially when they are trying to solve a problem, end a dispute, etc.
Conversation in a novel consists of dialogue between different characters, or onesided conversation between author and the reader. In any conversation, 'what is being talked about' will be judged differently at different points and the participants themselves may not have identical views of what each is talking about. There are informal ways of expressing the topic, in conversational discourse. (Brown & Yule, 1983 : 73) There are two points worth noting about conversational fragment. First, is a feature of a lot of conversation that 'topics' are not fixed beforehand, but are negotiated in the process of conversing. Throughout a conversation, the next 'topic' of conversation is developing. Each speaker contributes to the conversation in terms of both the existing topic framework and his or her personal topic. It is clear from extract that some elements in a speaker's personal topic do not become salient elements in the conversation if neither the other participant nor the speaker herself mention them again.

A second point to be noted in this, and in a large number of other conversational fragments, is that personal topics are frequently introduced through first person reference in one form or another. Although the points made in extract could have been expressed objectively as statements that certain
buildings in certain locations are more beautiful since restoration, both speakers relate such statements to personal experience. (Brown & Yule, 1983: 89-90)

For example, in 'Where Shall We Go This Summer?', the conversation between Karan and Sita ia as follows:

(a) "Will we go to Bombay, now?"

"Later."

"In two minutes?"

"No, later."

"In ten minutes."

"No later."

"Shall I count hundred? After I've counted a hundred, will we go?" (P. 137)

(b) "My memsahib!" reared Moses suddenly, putting an end to the titters scampering around the table. "The memsahib is coming."

"No!" They all cried in disbelief.

"No one has come in twenty years", said Ali, cruelly. "No one will come now."

"No?" roared Moses. "Then why did she send me twenty
rupees ?" He nearly broke the glass as he slammed it down for emphasis.

"For a lungi, you said", said Joseph, the careless sceptic.

"For preparing the house, getting it ready for her-and her children." (PP. 8-9)

"You should have thought of it earlier", he said. "It's too late now".

"Too late ? Why too late ? It's not born yet."

He was repelled, he turned away, not being able to see her any more for hatred of her. He hated her, hated her talk. "One can't have an abortion at this stage", he said fiercely, his face turned aside.

"Hu - " a breath fell from her heavily like a stone dropped. "Wh-what ?" she stammered. "Wh-abortion ?" (P. 34)

In 'Cry, The Peacock', the conversation between Gautam and Maya is as follows:

'You are still frightened', Gautama said, his voice reassuring, logical, calm. But why ? Now it is all quite over and finished with. He did not really suffer long. If you
would like a straw to cling to, then here is one—he did not suffer long. It was over before the vet arrived. The vet would only have prolonged the pain, in a case like this ....'

'He might have helped', I whimpered, knowing it had been hopeless.

'But it was hopeless.'

I moved closer to him, instinctively. 'He told us it had been hopeless', he said, stopping to light a cigarette. 'I am only sorry about your having been alone with the body all day, with no one to put it away. But by now it must have been cremated ....'

I drew away from him with a jerk. 'No, stop', I said, softly. 'Why do you tell me this?' (P. 14)

In, 'Clear Light of Day' the conversation between Bim and Tara is as follows:

'But they are not educated yet', Bim said sharply. "They haven't any degrees. They should go to college", She insisted.

"Why ?" said Tara.....
"Why?" repeated Bim indignantly. "Why, because they might find marriage isn't enough to last them the whole of their lives", she said darkly mysteriously. (Prasad, 1991: 93)

7.3 Situations

All the circumstances and things that are happening at a particular time and in a particular place is called situation. Desai's novels are no exceptions to it. There are certain situational discourse in her novels.

For example, in 'Where Shall We Go This Summer?', the conversation between Sita and Moses, shows situational discourse:

(a) "Why haven't you cleaned it?"

He rolled his eyeballs drolly. "It will take much time to clean."

"You had time. Why didn't you do it?"

"I've lit the lamps", he said sulkily and, getting up, began to shuffle towards the door.

"Here!"

"Bring the luggage in", she ordered.

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"Get the beds made. And food-haven't you got any food made ?." (Desai, 1975 : 29)

(b) "No water ? No well ?" he had asked incredulously, on first entering the house. 'We must make one', he decided.

"Yes, Yes - I will see to it - a tubewell, costing perhaps - umm", began Mr. Dalwala in embarrassed haste, but father cut him short quite brusquely, saying, "No, I will have no machines here. I can prove that machinery is not essential to civilization, even that it is inimical. For Indian civilization, I Think it is fatal. Gandhi taught us that".

"But then ?"

"We shall dig", father said spreading out his hands to show how long and strong his fingers were, how supple his wrists. (P. 67)

In, 'Cry, The Peacock', Maya's mental conditions shows the situational discourse :

(a) The entire situation of hopelessness, waiting that is too nauseating, is summed up in : "She sat there, sobbing, and waiting for her husband to come home." (P. 5)

(b) Two Indians, two English women Frozen in the stances of players on the stage ..... somewhere in a locked closet,
a slat of marble like a blank grave-stone awaiting an engraving, a grave and a bunch of flowers.” (P. 214)

In, 'Voices In The City', situational discourse is as follows (Acharya, 1991 : 54):

(a) "In the small of my back, I feel a surreptitious push from Jiban and am propelled forward into the embrace of his mother who is all in white and smells of clean rice and who, while placing her hand on my head in blessing, also pushes a little harder than I think necessary, and still harder till I realize what it means, and go down on my knees to touch her feet ... Another pair of feet appears to receive my touch, then another. How they all honour their own feet.” (P. 113)

In 'Fire On The Mountain' (Prasad, 1991 : 80): The old house, the full house, of that period of her life when she was the vice-chancellor's wife and at the hub of a small but intense and busy world, had not pleased her. Its crowding had stifled her... (P. 29)

In 'Clear Light of Day' situational discourse is as follows (Prasad, 1991 : 81):

"With her inner eye she saw how her own house and its
particular history linked and contained her as well as her whole family with all their separate histories and experiences - not binding ------." (P. 182)

References
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5. Ibid., P. 71.
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7. Ibid., P. 28.
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