METAPHORICAL REFERENCE IN PAUL RICOEUR : A STUDY

Paul Ricoeur in his *The Rule of Metaphor* develops a theory of metaphor which is distinct from the rest of the theories propounded by many scholars on this subject until recent times. In this theory of metaphor, one can see the shift from rhetorics to semantics and from semantics to hermeneutics.[1] This clearly shows that for him, metaphor is analysed from three different levels: (1) rhetorical, (2) Semantical and (3) heremeneutical. This movement from rhetorics to hermeneutics through semiotics and sementics is the primary study undertaken by Ricoeur in *The Rule of Metaphor* (Henceforth RM). This progression is analysed by him through the changes in the world, the sentence and finally in discourse. In this paper, I propose to discuss two important themes that are interconnected in Ricoeur's theory of metaphor. The first theme of this paper will focus on the shift from rhetorics to semantics and the limitation of the rhetorical approach. It will also explain how Ricoeur treats metaphor as a semantic innovation. The second theme will deal with the hermeneutical approach to metaphor which is the central study of RM. It also deals with the importance of metaphorical reference in Ricoeur's thought.

I

Ricoeur's first study, "Between Rhetoric and Poetics" in RM, deals with Aristotle's analysis of metaphor which starts with the idea that the word or the name is the basic unit of reference. It treats metaphor as a figure of speech. Aristotle's approach to metaphor is situated at the crossroads of two disciplines--rhetoric and poetics with distinct goals: "persuasion" in oral discourse and the *mimesis* of human action in tragic poetry.[2] This in short means that metaphor has two functions namely, a rhectorical and

a poetical.   In the *Poetics*,   Aristotle defines metaphor in the following way.

> Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, on the grounds of analogy.[3]

In the ancient and classical rhetorical approach, metaphor is reduced to a mere ornament of speech. Metaphor is nothing but a decorative phenomenon. This approach makes metaphor a trope, *i.e.,* a change or derivation affecting the meaning of words. Here metaphor does not convey any information and appears merely as a stylistic ornament.[4] Hence Ricoeur argues for the need to move from this semantics of the word to the semantics of discourse which treats metaphor as a phenomenon of predication, an unusual attribution precisely at the sentence-level of discourse. A purely rhetorical treatment of metaphor is the result of the excessive and damaging emphasis on the word[5] and hence for Ricoeur, there is a need to replace this by sentence as a basic unit. It is the discourse taken as a whole that bears the meaning in an undivided way.

This does not mean that Ricoeur altogether rejects the definition of metaphor as word. This is said to be the nominal definition of metaphor (held by Aristotle, Fontainer, for example), whereas the definition of metaphor in terms of sentence is said to be the real definition of metaphor. Ricoeur sees the intimate relation that exists between these two definitions and says that the nominal definition need not be abolished by the real one because the word remains the locus of the effect of metaphorical meaning. It is the word that is said to take a metaphorical meaning.

It is appropriate in this context to deal with two historically important theories of metaphor which Ricoeur examines in RM. In the third study, "Metaphor and the Semantics of Discourse" in RM, he makes a thorough study of metaphor where it is treated not as a deviant denomination, but as impertinent predication. This approach to metaphor at the level of sentence calls for a distinction between the substitution and the tension theory of metaphor. As

per the substitution theory, (*i.e.,* nominal definition) metaphor is nothing but a substitution of one word for another. The substitution of figurative for literal meaning is necessary when there is a gap in the lexical code or else it is to serve an ornamental function.[6] In the tension theory, (*i.e.,* real or genetic definition) metaphor is considered to be an agent generating a tension in a phrase. Here, metaphor presupposes a tension between a literal and a figurative interpretation of the statement. In this process, the literal interpretation of the statement is rejected and in its place, the figurative interpretation is taken into account and thus it becomes meaningful. Thus Ricoeur makes it clear that metaphor belongs to the whole statement and not to the particular word. Metaphor proceeds from the tension between all the terms in the statement. This makes Ricoeur's theory of metaphor as a semantic one, i.e., it has to deal with discourse. This means that metaphor which is predicative function occurs only in the context of a statement.

Metaphor is a semantic innovation according to Ricoeur. It does not occupy any state in established language. It occurs only within the discourse. Without semantic innovation, a statement becomes absurd. Because of this, a word in a statement attains a new value and gives the statement a "new pertinence".[7] In metaphor, there is a three-fold tension which gives rise to the semantic impertinence and which leads to the semantic innovation as a way of resolving it. The idea of tension is applied in the following way :

(a) tension within statement (between tenor and vehicle, between focus and frame, for example);

(b) tension between two interpretations (between literal and metaphorical interpretation, for example);

(c) tension in the relational function of the copula (between identity and difference in the interplay of resemblance).[8]

All these three-fold tensions operate at the level of meaning in the statement to lead to the semantic innovation.

Max Black in his *Models and Metaphors*[9] examines metaphor at the level of the statement as a whole in order to account for a change in meaning that is centred in the word. For Black, a term functions as a metaphor only in a statement because statement

is the fundamental semantic unit. By rejecting the substitution theory of metaphor and by introducing the "interaction theory of metaphor", Black speaks of the interaction that takes place between the undivided meaning of the statement and the focused meaning of the word. His theory of interaction operates between the levels of "focus". The focus is a word and the frame is a sentence. The frame functions like a filter or a screen and when a term is put into a frame, a new aspect is reached.

By examining Black's theory of metaphor, Ricoeur makes it clear that though metaphorical meaning is an effect of the entire statement it is focused on one world. For this reason he says that metaphor is a semantic innovation that belongs at once to the predicative order (new pertinence) and the lexical order (paradigmatic deviation)[10]. In this context Ricoeur remarks that strictly speaking there is no conflict between the substitution and interaction theories because both approches are grounded in the double character of the word. The following passage in RM explains this :

> As a lexeme, the word is a difference in the lexical code..... As a part of discourse, it bears a part of the meaning that belongs to the entire statement.[11]

II

The second theme we shall take up for discussion is about the relation between metaphor and the reality. Do metaphorical statements say anything about reality? For Ricoeur, the problem of reference can be studied from two different levels of semantics and of hermeneutics. In semantics, it deals only with entities belonging to sentence and in hermeneutics it addresses entities that are larger than the sentence and it is here we are concerned with the reference of the metaphorical statement which has the power to redescribe the reality.

Ricoeur makes use of Fregean distinction between sense and reference to explain the opposition between the semiotics and semantics. Sign differs from sign whereas discourse refers to the world. Difference   is semiotic[12] whereas reference is semantic. Ricoeur says :

> What is intended by discourse, the correlate of the entire sentence,
> is irreducible to what semiotics calls the signified, which is nothing
> but the counterpart of the signifier of a sign within the language
> code.[13]

Thus Ricoeur links the problem of reference with the notion of the intended by discourse which goes outside the language. What is intended by discourse points to an extra-linguistic reality which is its referent,[14] says Ricoeur. The intended, which is the counter-part of the entire sentence, is distinguished from the signified because of its transcendence-function.

It is interesting to note that though Ricoeur accepts Fregean distinction between sense and reference, he rejects the Fregean notion of reference which is applicable only to scientific statements and not to poetic statements. By rejecting the Fregean position, Ricoeur argues that a metaphorical statement achieves its reference upon the ruins of what might be called its literal reference.[15] It is true that Ricoeur also admits that the literary work through its structure displays a world only under the condition that the reference or descriptive discourse is suspended.[16] The literary work gains its denotation as a second-level denotation by means of the suspension of the first-level denotation of discourse.[17] Thus, Ricoeur argues that a metaphorical statement emphasises the relationship between the suspended and displayed reference. Just as the sense of the metaphorical statement is gained through the literal sense, the reference of the metaphorical statement is captured through the literal reference.

Ricoeur compares his theory of metaphoric reference with that of the generalized theory of denotation developed by Nelson Goodman in *Languages of Art* and Max Black in *Models and Metaphor*. For Goodman, metaphor is an unusual application of a familiar label to a new object that resists at first and then gives in. "It is an affair between a predicate with a past and an object that yields while protesting", says Goodman.[18] Ricour commends Goodman for admitting that as a symbolic system, poetry has a referential function as in the case of a descriptive discourse. But what is interesting is that here Ricoeur goes further and says that in the metaphorical discourse of poetry, referential power is linked to the eclipse of ordinary reference.[19] Similarly he says

that a poetic discourse faces reality by putting into heuristic fictions whose constitutive value is propositional to their power of denial. It helps in redescribing reality. The heuristic fictions shows the link between fiction and redescription.[20]

Another significant contribution of Goodman is that for him, the poetic discourse through their "transferred status" add to the shaping of the world. They are "true" to the extent that they are "appropriate".[21] But Ricoeur goes beyond this to say that in discourse of poetry, reality "invents" in both senses of the word: "what it creates, it discovers; and what it finds, it invents."[22]

In the last study, "Metaphor and Philosophical Discourse", in RM, metaphor is approached from the level of hermeneutics which has moved from rhetorics to semantics and from the problem of sense to the problem of reference. The question which Ricoeur raises here is this: "*what* philosophy is *implied* in this movement?"[23] The question here is two-fold. The first question is whether a philosophy is *implied* and the second question is which type of philosophy is involved in this movement. Ricoeur approaches both questions simultaneously. While explaining the independent nature of the philosophical discourse he argues that philosophical discourse cannot be reduced to metaphorical discourse. The discontinuity between these two discourses are analysed by him in the study of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Heidegger, and Derrida. In his study of Aristotle's doctrine of analogy of being, he proves that there is no direct passage from the semantic functioning of metaphorical expressions to the transcendental doctrine of analogy.

Similar approach has been made by Ricoeur with regard to Heidegger who declared that the metaphorical exists only within the metaphysical. This dictum suggests that both metaphysical and metaphorical transfers constitute one and the same *uber-tragung*.[24] For example, in metaphysics there is a transfer from visible to the invisible world and in metaphor, there is a transfer from literal to the figurative sense. Thus both transgressions constitute one and the same transfer. But Ricoeur points out that it is not metaphor that carries the structure of metaphysics; instead, metaphysics seizes the metaphorical process in order to make it work to the benefit of metaphysics.[25]

Ricoeur considers as naive the view that the semantics of metaphorical utterence contains ready-made an immediate ontology which philosophy has only to elicit and to formulate.[26] He abandons this view and admits that the metaphorical utterence makes speculative discourse possible. A poetical discourse sketches a tensional conception of truth for thought, whereas the possibility of speculative discourse lies in the semantic dynamism of metaphorical utterence.[27]

III

Let me repeat some of the observations I have made so far:

(1) In Ricoeur's theory of Metaphor, there is a movement from rhetorics to hermeneutics because the rhetorical approach treats metaphor as a stylistic devise, whereas the hermeneutical approach treats metaphor from the discourse level. (2) Metaphor is a semantic innovation and it gives a new value to the statement. (3) Metaphorical statement has the power to redescribe the reality and hence it has both sense and reference. (4) There exists both *relation and difference* between different modes of discourse. (5) The metaphorical utterence makes speculative discourse possible.

At the close of this study it can be stated that Ricoeur's study of metaphor is without a doubt an excellent examination dealing both with the history of the subject and with different contemporary theories of metaphor. It can also be stated that it accommodates theories of metaphor transcending their limitations.

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    See also my " Derrida and the Philosophy of Deconstruction" in the *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. xix,no.3, July 1992, pp. 255-259.

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21 *Ibid.*, p. 238.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 257.

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