POST-DERRIDEAN VIEW: A STUDY OF THE SELECTED WRITINGS OF RICHARD RORTY

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ABSTRACT: In the postmodern era after the World War II, Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) revolutionized the philosophical theories on art and literature. He is known for developing a method of semiotic interpretation famous as deconstruction and this philosophical idea is discussed in his various works such as Speech and Phenomena (1967), Of Grammatology. All these writings of Derrida greatly impacted the philosophical thoughts of the contemporary thinkers. Derrida published more than forty books and delivered a large number of lectures and influenced social sciences including philosophy, psychoanalysis and politics. He came in contact with prominent cultural critics and thinkers of his time such as Louis Althusser and studied Edmund Husserl and James Joyce. He was invited to deliver a lecture in John Hopkins University where he read a paper on Deconstruction. Derrida is a founding father of Deconstruction; a strategy of critical questioning directed to expose the metaphysical assumptions and internal contradictions in philosophy. In his Of Grammatology, Derrida expounds and elucidates the main ideas of deconstruction. Derrida’s critical tool serves to interpret the western thought by reversing “binary oppositions” that provides its foundation. Philosophers of hermeneutic tradition are Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Lyotard, Deluze and Jameson... In contrast to Derrida, Rorty has discussed the issues of media and time philosophy in passing. He rejected many ideas of Derrida and evolved his own neo-pragmatic philosophy. Rorty directs his views against the epistemological mainstream which determines the tradition of modern philosophy.

KEY WORDS: Deconstruction, Pragmatic, Philosophical, Epistemological, Metaphysical, Assumptions, Semiotic, Conventions.

I. INTRODUCTION

Saussure defined the social system in terms of language and speech. Terence Hawkes (1977) in his book Structuralism and Semiotics observes the significance of binary relationship; Derrida argues that each sign is the result of relations between words and meanings between a signifier and signified. Rorty argues that the real strength of Derrida lies in his giving up of transcendental project of “an ironist theory” (Rorty 122) which determined Of Grammatology. Derrida’s introduced his personal philosophy to personalize philosophy by “falling back on private fantasy” (Rorty,125). Derrida developed his negative theory of time as phenomena of “trace, reserve, or difference” (93). Rorty observes that Derrida was involved in his public project earlier years but in the later period he shifted to literature and became a writer and appeared not as a philosopher. In this research paper the theory of deconstruction of Derrida and the review and reinterpretation of Richard Rorty is the main focus. Derrida and Richard Rorty are postmodern philosophers who have set new trends in philosophy, linguistics, history and hermeneutics. Reading the works of Jacques Derrida is an appalling exercise. In this study the efforts are made to explain the meaning of deconstruction and hermeneutics of Derrida within literary theory. He claims that all texts have ambiguity. Derrida followed Socrates and successfully broke the crust of convention questioning philosophical assumptions in his writings. Derrida was a learned scholar and a professor; he deeply investigated the Newtonian physics, Augustan theology, Darwinian biology and the ethics of Kant. He also read and explored the images and metaphors hidden in the poetry of Schiller and explored the irony of Socrates. Derrida was a voracious reader, he investigated historicism of Hegel, aestheticism of Nietzsche and Schiller and pragmatism of Dewey. He also investigated the theory of language given by Wittgenstein and Davidson as a means for coordinating human action. The critics of Derrida observe that Derrida has brought poetry into philosophy. Derrida gives the message of patience shown by Franz Kafka (1994) who said: “All human errors are impatience, a premature breaking off of methodical procedure, an apparent fencing in of what is apparently at issue” (Kafka 3). Like Kafka, Derrida brought a radical transformation in literary criticism. Gutting (2001) observes that “Derrida’s writings require constant attention; his writings are explicit probing of traditional philosophical concepts” (290).

Derrida is closely associated with the major figures associated with post-structuralism and postmodern philosophy. He was impacted by the philosophical ideas of Bergson, Bakhtin, Saussure and Roland Barth. Derrida is a prolific writer; he wrote more than forty books and hundreds of essays and had commendable contribution and influence on social sciences, philosophy, art and literature, law, language and linguistics.
Derrida’s philosophical ideas greatly impacted ontology, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and hermeneutics. Derrida started with the reinterpretation of philosophical ideas rejecting the ideas propounded by Plato, Descartes and Hegel. In his *Of Grammatology* (1974) he reconsiders the assumptions of Western philosophy and analyzes such concepts as “existence of God” “theory of origin” and the dichotomous relationship “essence as an idea”, appearance as “particular and ego as subject.”

II. JACQUES DERRIDA: THE THEORY OF DECONSTRUCTION

Derrida came under the influence of Bakhtin who was a Russian critic and who for the first time subverted the concept of sign in the domain of structuralism. He propounded his own theory of language and believed that the dialogues of human beings have social relevance. They are a medium to convey the existential reality and perform three important functions; they link the speakers with the audience and at the same time the dialogues convey all the social and political problems and hence they lead to social transformation. For Bakhtin, the language is a medium to bring changes in the society. Bakhtin introduced interdisciplinary and inter-textual research. The dialogues are social construct and differ from man to man and from society to society. Bakhtin believes that social world is made of multiple voices of the people and many perspectives are put in the dialogues. The power of the dialogues is immense as they can excite new interpretative and analytical interest. Indeed, Bakhtin argues that the dialogues represent intertextuality and have interdisciplinary significance. Richard Rorty gave a critique of the sign of Derrida and how it challenges the Western metaphysics and philosophy. Derrida opined that the analytical and logocentric interest in philosophy is widely known in the West. He called it Logos; and this is far away from transcendental reality. Derrida developed the theory of deconstruction in 1960. He gave a revolutionary idea that all texts are packed with ambiguity. The critics of Derrida made serious efforts to explain deconstruction and they opined that it means something which has multiplicity of meanings. Derrida’s famous books such as *Writing and Difference, Speech and Phenomena* and *Of Grammatology* brought revolution in literary criticism. Rorty called him the philosopher of language because he was the first postmodernist who introduced new forms of language philosophy. Hobson (1998) lashed harsh criticism on Derrida and dubbed him a misinformed and a notorious thinker of language.

In semiotics, Deconstruction is a unique tool of critical analysis and has the potential to expose the metaphysical assumptions of language. There is a tendency to view deconstruction as a continuum on the assumption that to deconstruct is to destroy. Deconstruction certainly means the death of a meaning, of absolute truth, of universal value. The theory is discussed in detail in his *Of Grammatology*. Deconstruction is discussed as a critical practice which serves to interpret the Western thought by reversing the binary opposition. Derrida investigated the dialogues of Plato and Socrates and took inspiration from Saussure and learnt from him the art of critical interpretation in criticism and philosophy deconstructing the texts. He gives an insight into the reading of the texts and formulates a system to interpret the texts. Derrida observes that there is a definite complicity between reading and writing. He opines that the text should be read as a text as everything is there in the text. Reading of the text is a serious business for Derrida as it contains all the issues and the images and the metaphors symbolizing the main issues. The language is very important for Derrida. Very often the readers misunderstand the text as human communication is faulty.

Derrida opines that deconstruction is not destruction but it is a process of dismantling cultural structures. Construction and deconstruction is a continuous process in social system and often there are cracks in the system where facts are disguised. It is only through the process of deconstruction the evils of the system can be found out. Deconstruction distrusts all systems; it views language as a play of differences and produces a strategy that enables one to discover the powerful. The term “writing” and “difference” were given specific meanings.

Richard Rorty was an activist and a writer. Rorty graduated from University of Chicago in 1949; completed his Ph. D in 1956 from Yale University. He became a lecturer in Philosophy in Princeton University and soon became Professor at Stanford University. Rotry in his famous article: “Is Derrida a Transcendental Philosopher?” observes that Derrida has little to offer when read as a transcendental philosopher. In this research project all the major philosophical issues; linguistic thoughts; ideas relating to structuralism; semiotics; structuralism and post-structuralism are investigated through the lens of the philosophical ideas of Richard Rorty. He argues that the two traditions compliment rather than oppose each other. Rorty came under the influence of many thinkers such as Darwin, Kant James Heidegger, Bakhtin and Derrida. Rorty injected a bold vision in the philosophy from the perspective of pragmatism. This project offers a critique of Rotry’s views on knowledge, language, truth, science, morality, structuralism and post-structuralism. He has been a lightning rod for conflicting currents in the domain of postmodern philosophy. The writings of Rorty excited a number of
philosophers and thinkers generating mixture of enthusiasm, hostility and confusion. Rorty is considered as one of the prominent influential philosopher and thinker like Bertrand Russell. He is a remarkable philosopher and a pragmatic thinker with a broad intellectual range, his works made commendable contribution to literary criticism and his articles appeared in The Nation and The Atlantic giving an insight into postmodernism, liberalism, pragmatism and anti-foundationalism. Rotry’s name is associated with Jacques Derrida, Dewey and Habermas. Rorty gave a new name and place of America in the domain of philosophy and political liberalism.

Richard Rorty came under the influence of William James and he conceived “pragmatism” to counter Derrida’s philosophy of deconstruction. He was well aware of the various schools that flourished under the rubric of pragmatism and German idealism. But the revolutionary ideas of Rorty continued spreading worldwide. Derrida and Rorty rejected the claim of Habermas that there exists a link between universalism, rationalism and modern democracy. Their disagreement with Habermas is not political but theoretical. Rorty firmly believes that democracy is a good government for the welfare of the people. Richard Rorty made intensive study of Jacques Derrida for the last twenty years; he admired Derrida and his French deconstruction theory presenting him as an example of a new way of practicing philosophy; a way which is original leading to individual autonomy. Richard Rorty investigates the philosophical ideas of Derrida; his non-Kantian dialectical tradition and to examine him as “a philosopher of language.” This study gives an insight to the main currents of postmodernist thoughts and philosophy of Jacques Derrida who brought revolution through his theory of deconstruction.

Rorty has examined Derrida from two main perspectives; he is considered as philosopher of language. Rorty has poor opinion of the theory of deconstruction as he criticizes texts as Speech and Phenomena, Of Grammatology of Derrida. Derrida’s contribution is his genuine philosophical turn by rejecting the traditional modes of philosophical thoughts. Richard Rorty investigates all the basic premises of Derrida and his cult of deconstruction; the tension between postmodernism deconstruction and the relevance of deconstruction in the modern times. There is certainly logic in the postmodern discourse of Derrida and Rorty as they define ethics in terms of otherness and difference. Rorty contends that the critical methodology of Derrida doesn’t provide any systematic framework to solve the conflicting issues relating to culture and society and political democracy.

It is pertinent to note that Rorty advocated a therapeutic approach to philosophy in all his writing career. His first book Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (1979) is regarded as his most important work. He investigated all the important issues of ethics and aimed to reveal how the problems stem from unconscious assumptions and misleading images of language. Derrida held that language is the last refuge of the Kantian tradition and it is language alone which gives structure to the universe, moral law and the ethics. William James (1938) in his book Pragmatism and the Meaning of Truth argued that true ideas are not always straightforward copy of reality but an approximation that allows an individual to summarize his experiences. He introduced analytical philosophy suggesting that philosophy must get past these pseudo-problems if it is to be productive. There are three parts of the book and the main argument of Rorty argues that epistemology is the arbiter of what is rational in Western cultures. Kant observed that mind is something that adds to reality in the process of creating knowledge. Kant also observed that philosophy is a tribute of reason what can be called “knowledge” or “rationality.” Rorty confronted with the problem to explore the nature of Truth; to answer “What is Truth?.” It is believed that truth is that which is ultimately finality and absolutely real. Truth cannot contradict itself. Rorty relied on a representational theory of perception and advocated a pragmatic theory of truth, believing that language of a man might mirror the truth or reality. He departs from the ideas of traditional philosophers such as Sellars, Quine and Donald Davison who put faith in objective/ subjective dialogue in favor of communal version of truth. Postmodern thinkers reject objective truth and they wish to replace objectivity with subjectivity: truth is not discovered, but created or constructed.

In his second book Consequences of Pragmatism (1982), Richard Rorty propounded the thought provoking theory of pragmatism. The book Consequences of Pragmatism contains twelve essays which Rorty wrote between 1972 and 1980 with an introduction. In all the philosophical papers the main focus of Rorty is to establish the fact that philosophy mirrors all the political problems of life and society. Rorty considers philosophy as one problem field, much as alchemy is. Just the base metal cannot be transmuted into gold, similarly truth cannot change in any circumstances. Rorty argues that many alchemists turned chemist, similarly freed of aspirations of foundationalism, the philosophers may turn into cultural critics. He is a real intellectual without portfolio and his main concern is to explore the nature truth which operates in the universe everywhere. He advocates an inversion of the epistemic hierarchy that Plato describes in The Republic. There is no room for the philosopher who attempts to transcend contingency. Rorty identifies what he calls a “holiest and pragmatic trend” in postmodernist philosophy. Man’s inability to attain an absolute conception of reality creates a distinction between appearance and reality that invites universal skepticism. In this respect Rorty’s anti-realism has much in common with Kant’s idealism. Rorty’s rejection of realism and representationalism draws on the arguments that it seeks to dissolve. Rorty interprets philosophical realism as an attempt to reduce representation...

In the next book *Achieving Our Country* (1998), Rorty gives his own independent ideas about truth, hope and philosophies. He observes that there are two sides of the Left; the cultural Left and the reformist Left. No doubt all these intellectuals give an insight into the ills of society. Then there is progressive Left exemplified by John Dewey making progress in the philosophical spirit of pragmatism. Rorty begins the book by arguing the case of national pride to bring improvement in the country. He also discusses the Vietnam War and observes that national pride has been damaged and hence politics is also affected. Leftist literature focuses on what is wrong with America. He has discussed the ideas of John Wayne, Heidegger and Foucault who argued that people live in a violent, inhuman and corrupt world.

To conclude, Richard Rorty’s *Philosophy and Social Hope* (2000) further contributes to the philosophy of pragmatism. He argues that there is no form of government which can bring an end to the problems of society. He rejects the utopian view of society and believes that a liberal state is not a panacea. As we progress toward a better society founded upon solidarity, new problems will arise which will require new solutions. We must have a pragmatic approach to truth, politics and philosophy in order to grapple with the current and future problems. Rorty has examined each perspective; he is concerned about history, the future, epistemology and secularization. These are important characteristics for the future of a nation. Rorty has given four important conditions that can make a nation great based on his theory of pragmatism:

1) Philosophy must promote the national pride
2) People must get hope for a better future and the politics must address and solve the problems of the society
3) There must be a constructive and pragmatic view of truth
4) Secularization must be ensured in a society.

Rorty argues that only the progressive Left alone can fulfill each of these requirements.

Richard Rorty’s *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (1991) further gives his views on his postmodern pragmatism. He investigates the philosophical views of John Dewey on objectivity to serve the purpose of community. Dewey also discusses the role of science and scientific method to bring about the secular democratic society. Dewey published his famous book *Quest for Certainty* (1925), and *Experience and Nature* (1825) and *Reconstruction of Philosophy* (1957) and explored the ills of society and philosophy and its relevance in the modern world. In this book, Rorty touches upon various issues concerning politics; liberalism; textual criticism and philosophy. Richard Rorty’s last book *Philosophy as Cultural Politics* (2007) further explores his postmodern pragmatism rejecting Derrida’s deconstruction theory. He begins the book by rejecting the idealism of Hegel and pins hope on pragmatic philosophy which alone is suitable for the modern American liberal society. The main aim of philosophy is to achieve what Rorty called “cultural politics” He has investigated the views of Dewey on pragmatism.

### III. Reference

Richard Rorty was an important American philosopher of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century who blended expertise in philosophy and comparative literature into a perspective called "The New Pragmatism" or "neopragmatism." Rejecting the Platonist tradition at an early age, Rorty was initially attracted to analytic philosophy. As his views matured he came to believe that this tradition suffered in its own way from representationalism, the fatal flaw he associated with Platonism. Influenced by the writings of Darwin, Gadamer, Hegel and Heidegger, he turned towards Pragmatism. Rorty's Richard Rorty's "Objectivity or Solidarity" is a case study in the use of false alternatives for rhetorical gain. The essay begins by presenting us with an awfully weird and unappealing choice. Rorty claims that there are just two main ways to "give sense" to our lives. Either one can make up a story about oneself in which one's life figures in the life of a bigger community, or one can think about standing in a certain direct relationship to the mind-independent world. If you go in for the first, then you like solidarity. If you go in for the second, you like objectivity. Richard H. King is Lecturer in the Department of American Studies, University of Nottingham, Nottingham NG7 2RD. Article. Richard Rorty's "In Other Words: The Philosophical Writings of Richard Rorty. Volume 19, Issue 1. Richard H. King (a1).