

CHAPTER III

WORDS AND THOUGHT

CHAPTER - III

WORDS AND THOUGHT

Communication is an important aim for any artist, as art aims at communication. Communication implies that an experience is to be communicated. The artist whether he is a painter or a poet, works through a certain medium. The words are the medium of writer. The thought is clarified through words. The artist must understand the limitations and the laws of the medium in which he is working. A writer is a craftsman in words. So he must select the words which may help to present thought clearly. Language is the vehicle for expressing ideas. In poetry words are always liable to interfere with, and even in extreme cases contradict, the theme or argument.¹ The above discussion makes clear that the words are essential for language. The words are the symbolic presentation of thought.

A) WORDS :

In Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English Hornby defines word as sound or combination of sounds forming a unit of the grammar or vocabulary of a language.² The above definition makes clear that word is the essential part of a language having grammar or vocabulary sense. Dr. Hardev Bahri in his book Definitional Dictionary of Linguistic Terms gives definitions of word

of many writers. According to Hockett, word is a sentence segment bounded by points at which pausing is possible. According to Bloomfield, word is a minimum free form. Palmer defines word as the smallest speech unit capable of functioning as a complete utterance.³ The above definitions make clear that word has separate identity and it carries separate thought. In The Practice of Criticism word is defined as a permanent set of possibilities of understanding.⁴

Words are alive as our other acts are alive though apart from the minds which use them they are nothing but agitations of the air or stains on paper. A word is to be a component of an act of the mind so subtly dependent on the other components of this act and of other acts which can be distinguished from these interactions only as a convenience of discourse.

B) THOUGHT :

The main function of language is the expression of thought. In The New Encyclopaedia Britannica the word 'thought' is defined as to think and to think means to string together linguistic elements subvocally.⁵ The element of thinking are classifiable as 'symbols' in accordance with the conception of the sign process. According to the classical empiricist associationist view, the succession of ideas or images in train of thought is determined by the laws of association.

The above discussion regarding thought makes clear that thought represented through language, is well understood by the association theory. The meaning of the word changes according to the context. Words need the proper stringing to carry out the meaning. The thought is nothing but a proper response to the object or thing.

C) Words and Thought Relationship :

The writer writes to communicate and language is the means for that communication. Language is made of words, and hence a study of words is all important if we are to understand the meaning of a work of art. Words carry four kinds of meaning. The total meaning of a word depends upon four factors. These are sense, feeling, tone and intention. By sense is meant something that is communicated by the plain literal meanings of the words. Feeling refers to emotions and attitudes. The tone means the writer's attitude to the reader. He chooses his words and arranges them keeping in mind the kind of readers likely to read his work. The tone reflects the awareness of the relationship between the writer and his reader. Intention is the writer's aim which refers to the effect one tries to produce. This purpose modifies the expression.

Words also acquire a rich associative value through their use by different writers in different contexts. The context in which

a word has been used is very important. Words have different meanings in different contexts. Words are symbols or signs and they deliver their full meaning only in a particular context. The word context is derived from Latin having the meaning - 'Woven together'. In A Dictionary of Literary Terms Martin Gray defines context as the parts immediately before or after a chosen passage in a literary work : the words and ideas which surround a statement, and therefore, give it its particular meaning.⁶ Words work in association and within a particular context. I.A.Richards writes - "A context is a set of entities (things or events) related in a certain way; these entities have each a character, such that other sets of entities occur having the same characters and related by the same relation; and these occur nearly uniformly." In The practice of Criticism, the idea of word is described with context theory as -

"Words only work together. We understand no word except in and through its interactions with other words."⁷

The above discussion makes clear that word in isolation is meaningless. It will be meaningful if it is considered with other words. Richards makes clear that the word has a familiar sense in 'a literary context', as other words before and after a given word which determine how it is to be interpreted.⁸ The

interpretation or the meaning of the word depends upon the other words. The context is nothing but the governing conditions of an interpretation. The name context is for a whole cluster of events that recur together - including the required conditions as well as whatever we may pick out as cause or effect. The context theorem of meanings helps us to avoid making hundreds of baseless and disabling assumptions and over-simplifications that create false problems interfering with closer comparisons.

Richards makes remark regarding word-thought relationship in regard to context theory as -

"That no word can be judged as to whether it is good or bad, correct or incorrect, beautiful or ugly, or anything else that matters to a writer, in isolation."⁹

The above opinion clarifies the relative significance of the context. The context theory helps to get a thought given in the word. There is a right or good use for every word and that literary virtue consists in making that use of it. We call some writers as the best writers as they use words effectively.

The principal words incessantly change their meanings with the sentences they go into and the contexts they derive from. A completely isolated word would be meaningless. In other words, a shift of meaning is a flaw in discourse, a regrettable accident,

instead of a virtue. The words have, or should have, proper meanings which people should recognize, agree about and stick to.

It is thought which is directed and organized, and it is also thought which is recorded and communicated. There is a direct relation of symbols with thought. In The New Encyclopaedia Britannica symbol is defined as a communication element intended to simply represent or stand for a complex of person, object, group or idea.¹⁰ The words mean nothing' by themselves as they are instruments used by a thinker. We can also say that symbols record events and communicate facts. In The Meaning of Meaning, Richards takes reference of the history of language and makes clear that -

"The meaning of words had no longer the same relation to things, but was changed by men as they thought proper."¹¹

The above statement suggests that there is no relative permanent meaning of word as it is changed if it is needed by the user.

While clarifying the context theory Richards gave the following idea -

"There is, we are sure, a sign which refers to a place and is being interpreted by a person."¹²

Here he gives his sign-situation theory. The word is a sign which refers to the situation and becomes meaningful. Word carries thought is nothing but it carries meaning and makes communication possible.

Richards tells about the 'context' theory of meaning of words as follows -

1. Words interanimate one another. They are qualified by the whole context in which they figure, and they bring to that context* powers derived from other contexts in which they have figured in the past.

Here the power of words is discussed. The value of the words is well understood with the context. The words are liable to bring power to the context with previous context.

2. The problem of meaning, especially the meaning of a poem or drama or a piece of fiction - is seen to be a matter not easily and summarily determined.

Here the words used in any work of art is difficult to understand as they may convey different meaning. A word may be simultaneously both literal and metaphoric.

3. The poet necessarily tailor - makes his language as he explores his meaning. He does not (and can not) "build up the meaning of his sentences as a mosaic is put together of discrete independent tesserae." The senses of the author's words are not 'fixed factors' but are resultants which we arrive at only through the interplay of the interpretative possibilities of the whole utterance.

The words used by the author do not carry the fixed meaning. The meaning of the word is finalized by the context in which it stands. The word may lose its original meaning in the context. So the author explores the meaning of the words with the context.

4. The reader, like the writer, finds the meaning through a process of exploration, 'inference and guess work.'

The author asks the reader to explore the meaning of the word with inference and guesswork. The meaning of the word is understood with the context.

5. In the light of the context theory, metaphor is seen to be a typical instance of the merging of contexts.

The word may simultaneously support many different metaphors,

may serve to focus into one meaning many different meanings. The metaphor is more than a mere 'comparison' that illustrates a point, or recommends a doctrine by lending it an attractive colouring. It joins two far apart or unrelated contexts.

To conclude this chapter I quote the words of I.A.Richards:

"The contextual theory of signs to which, then, we first proceed, will be found to throw light on the primitive idea that Words and Things are related by some magic bond."

R E F E R E N C E S

1. Christopher Butler and Alastair Fowler, Topics in Criticism, (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1971), P-41.
2. A.S.Hornby, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), P-991.
3. Hardev Bahri, Definitional Dictionary of Linguistic Terms, (New Delhi: National Publishing House, 1985), P-224.
4. Zinter, Kissane and Limberman M.M., The Practice of Criticism, (Bombay: D.B.Taraporevala Sons and Co. Pvt.Ltd., 1975), P-238.
5. Philip W.Goetz, ed. The New Encyclopaedia Britanica (Vol. 28) (Chicago: The University of Chicago,, 1989), P-641.
6. Martin Gray, ed. A Dictionary of Literary Terms, (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1990), P- 53
7. Zinter, Kissane and Limberman M.M., The Practice of Criticism, (Bombay: D.B.Taraporevala Sons and Co. Pvt. Ltd., 1975), P-238.
8. I.A.Richards, The Philosophy of Rhetoric, (New York : Oxford University Press, 1965), P-32.
9. Ibid, 51.

10. Philip W. Goetz, The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, (Vol-13),
(Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1989), P-
458.
11. C.K.Ogden and I.A.Richards, The Meaning of Meaning, (London:
Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1923), P-18.
13. Ibid., P-21.
14. Ibid., P-47.
