Chapter 6
Literary Education and Communal Hope: Richard Rorty's Neo-Pragmatic Philosophy

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Abstract The aim of the paper is to put forth how Richard Rorty's philosophy of literary education could serve as a response to the Indian social crisis. From Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature through his subsequent works, we tend to find three subject matters: Firstly, we ought to abandon correspondence theories of truth and concentrate upon a pragmatic understanding of truth that dismisses Cartesian models of epistemology; secondly, it's fair to imagine that each individual has two unique sides—one that is visible to others and one that is not. Even while both sides may have similar sentiments, one's public and private perspectives may not always be compatible; finally, literary criticism, frequently referred to as literary studies are to be considered as the ultimate philosophical endeavour. The main argument of the paper derived from the interpretation of Rorty's three principle beliefs is that a society rich in literary study founded upon a literary education is better, comparatively to where only a selective group of people gain from serious literary engagement. Numerous academic publications in the area of literary philosophy that discuss Rorty's views and their relevance to education have been taken into account. The convergence of literary criticism, philosophy, and education in Rorty's work which has largely been overlooked by researchers in the area, is taken into consideration, in connection to which a number of communal issues have also been articulated with an eye towards how Rorty would respond to such issues.

Keywords Literary criticism · Pragmatic truth · Social crisis

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1 Introduction to Rorty's Literary Philosophy

In his book Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, Richard Rorty argues that, "Philosophy is not a name for a discipline which confronts permanent issues, and unfortunately keeps mistaking them, or attacking them with clumsy dialectical instruments. Rather, it is a cultural genre, a 'voice in the conversation of mankind… which centres on one topic rather than another at some given time not by dialectical necessity but as a result of various things happening elsewhere in the conversation… or of individual men of genius who think of something new… or perhaps of the resultant of several forces" (Rorty 1979: p. 264). Philosophy cannot and should not assert that its techniques are infallible. It also shouldn't assert that its subject of study is an everlasting or non-temporal reality. In terms of technique, Rorty appears to be of the opinion that philosophy is unable to explain all of the essential aspects of all types of human thought.

Rorty would want to counter that philosophy is not, as he puts it, "the very nature" of philosophy. It is impossible for philosophy to be what its proponents want it to be, such as, a separate academic field or a kind of "technical or professional philosophy" (Tartaglia 2007: p. 3). We are unable to see the mind as a mirror that can reflect the world outside of it, no matter how clearly or dimly. Furthermore, philosophy cannot be seen as being bound by the tenet of "adequatio et reiintellectus", i.e. adequacy between the intellect and the object. Although we have seen the philosophical "battle of the giants"; for instance, Plato v. Aristotle, or Rationalism v. Empiricism; throughout the ages, Rorty appears to have supported Heidegger in this view, for the most fundamental questions have been left ignored since then. In his magnum opus Being and Time, Heidegger writes, "This question has today been forgotten. Even though in our time we deem it progressive to give our approval to 'metaphysics' again… Yet the question we are touching upon is not just any question. It is one which provided a stimulus for the researches of Plato and Aristotle, only to subside from the one as a theme for actual investigation. What these two men achieved was to persist through many alterations and 'retouchings' down to the logic of Hegel. And what they wrested with the utmost intellectual effort from the phenomena, fragmentary and incipient though it was, has long since become trivialized" (Heidegger 1962: p. 2).

Furthermore, in Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, Rorty reveals the luminaries he draws on for inspiration and influence in his own thinking namely, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey. In Rorty and the Mirror of Nature, Tartaglia writes that "Other than their being the most romantic, the farthest out, and the most prophetic"—they "are all opposed to representational conceptions of the mind and knowledge, that is, to the Mirror of Nature idea" (Tartaglia 2007: p. 19). The contribution and applicability of Wittgenstein to Rorty is his therapeutic notion of philosophy, is Rorty's assertion that "philosophy shouldn't solve rather its task is to dissolve," is the evidence of Wittgenstein's impact, and it puts into question the belief that philosophy is potent and has the responsibility to essentialise things. He uses Heidegger's "desctruction" in Sein und Zeit in his approach to historical deconstruction, which is visible in

Rorty's perspective on philosophy in general and epistemology in particular. Dewey, whose gift to Rorty and effect on him is pragmatism as he puts it, "The philosopher I most admire, and of whom I should most like to think of myself as a disciple, is John Dewey. Dewey was one of the founders of American pragmatism. He was a thinker who spent sixty years trying to get us out from under the thrall of Plato and Kant" (Sanders 1996: p. 523).

Richard Rorty abandoned doing "real philosophy," that is, the pursuit of abstract truths and is best described by James Ryerson as a "transitory professor of trendy studies" (Rorty 1978: p. ix) because his academic career took a tripartite form, moving from Humanities at Virginia University to Comparative Literature at Stanford University. Similar to this, his philosophy-related approach takes the shape of a triptych. He first described his method as analytical at the beginning of his career but changed to calling it "postmodern" in the early 1980s. After a decade, he gave up this concept as well and entitled his viewpoint as "post-Nietzschean philosophy," since the dominant beliefs were similar to the American pragmatism of Pierce, James, and Dewey. However, since Rorty rejects the "representationalist" explanation of language and repeatedly describes and re-describes the self and the society, his understanding of pragmatism or approach to philosophy is commonly referred to as "neo-pragmatism".

Rorty seeks to elevate literature and literary culture above the culture of the Enlightenment in his neo-pragmatism. Despite the utter conventional disdain for this link of philosophy and literature, the dominant relationship between philosophy and literature throughout the history of philosophy from Plato to Rorty is now at the forefront of philosophical discussions among modern philosophers. Rorty claims that as a result, since the Renaissance, Western intellectuals have advanced through three phases, calling his thesis as Philosophy as a Transitional Genre: "I can now state my thesis. It is that the intellectuals of the West have, since the Renaissance, progressed through three stages: they have hoped for redemption first from God, then from philosophy, and now from literature…Literature, finally, offers redemption through making the acquaintance of as great a variety of human beings as possible…" (Rorty 2007: p. 91).

In literature, particularly in the works of poets and novelists, Rorty appears to find genuine redemption, for different literary works for him depict various facets of the human experience. Take for instance the short story "Mahesh" ("The Drought," 1922) by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, which explores the pitiful existence of Gafur and his daughter Amina. "Mahesh" explores the challenges that the marginalised section of Indian society confronts today, as it gives a powerful account of the anguish a duo of father and daughter experience at the hands of society at large, and their landlord in particular. The story set during a period of extreme drought details the struggles of Gafur, a Muslim weaver who resides in Kashipur with his daughter Amina and their bull, Mahesh (Chattopadhyay 2023). The higher classes, or the landlords (zamindars) and priests (Brahmins), who are at the top of the social pyramid in "Mahesh," are the cause of the marginalised difficulties for the downtrodden, making it hard to even maintain the appearance of a respectable standard of living.

Rorty would suggest as he did by exemplifying works of various English novelists, that by reading it we'd get to live and understand the pathetic life of the characters and

relate it with the social world we live in, and get exposed to the different aspects of human emotions and the depiction of mire of the society which would later on let the readers empathise with the poor characters in the outside world. More to add, Rorty's philosophy is based on the three pillars of hope, literature, and romanticism in order to build a perfect future. He promotes a change away from the insistence on scientific and rational thinking and towards literary thinking. He thinks that romanticism and literature should be embraced as the best examples of progress and that doing so is the most erratic method to bring about change.

Moreover, poetry, in particular, has a bigger relevance for Rorty than other forms of literature and to illustrate the superiority of poetry over philosophy, Rorty uses a poem by Phillip Larkin at the opening of Chapter Two of Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity. He writes, "I think Larkin's poem owes its interest and its strength to this reminder of the quarrel between poetry and philosophy, the tension between an effort to achieve self-creation by the recognition of contingency and an effort to achieve universality by the transcendence of contingency….The important philosophers of our own century are those who have tried to follow through on the Romantic poets by breaking with Plato and seeing freedom as the recognition of contingency. These are the philosophers who try to detach Hegel's insistence on historicity from his pantheistic idealism…rather than the scientist, who is traditionally pictured as a finder. More generally, they have tried to avoid anything that smacks of philosophy as contemplation, as the attempt to see life steadily and see it whole, in order to insist on the sheer contingency of individual existence" (Rorty 1989: pp. 25–26).

2 Objective of the Study

- To trace the significance of Richard Rorty's literary philosophy and its bearing on social concerns.
- To envision a neo-pragmatic literary education.
- To describe literary philosophy as a moral culture.

3 Literary Education as a Means to Communal Hope

The conventional definition of education could be read as a process of obtaining, practising, and applying diverse types of knowledge. Measures of knowledge acquisition and short-term memory are widely established practices, as seen by the aggressive testing movements in elementary and secondary schools and the unrelenting assessment practices in colleges and universities. Therefore, one could argue that any theory about what it means to possess or acquire knowledge, as Richard Rorty's Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature deals with the history of philosophical treatment of ideas about truth and knowledge, and further makes an effort to dismantle epistemologies, supposedly has answers to education.

Rorty drew inspiration from Hans Gadamer's hermeneutics and Dewey's pragmatism and further established a hybrid philosophy and says "Learning is not a process of helping us to get in touch with something non-human called Truth or Reality (other-worldly, objective, ultimate, unchanging) rather it is what keeps us in touch with our potentialities" (Rorty 1997: p. 525). Both Gadamer's hermeneutics and Dewey's pragmatism aid the view that truth doesn't rest upon some ultimate and other-worldly reality but rather is merely to which Wittgenstein refers to as a language-game played in social contexts. Rorty contends that as truth is linguistically conditioned, what some may refer to as objective truth is really only a statement that is true in a certain environment or cultural context: "Truth is a property of sentences, since sentences are dependent for their existence upon vocabularies, and since vocabularies are made by human beings, so are truths" (Rorty 1989: p. 5).

According to Rorty, letting rid of the idea of Truth makes education possible. However, to claim that Rorty is attempting to definitively refute correspondence conceptions of Truth, would be deceptive. In the second section of the Philosophy and the Mirrors of Nature, Rorty argues how minimising epistemological concerns enables a less-conventional vision of education and further explores the concept of "edification" by drawing on the writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer. For Rorty, edification is the process of "finding new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking" (Rorty 1979: p. 360), about oneself in particular. He further remarks that Gadamer has made a significant educational distinction "by substituting the notion of Bildung… for that of 'knowledge' as the goal of thinking" (Rorty 1979: p. 359). He further writes, "To say that we become different people, that we 'remake' ourselves as we read more, talk more, and write more, is simply a dramatic way of saying that the sentences which become true of us by virtue of such activities are often more important to us than the sentences which become true of us when we drink more, earn more, and so on. The events which make us able to say new and interesting things about ourselves are, in this non-metaphysical sense, more 'essential' to us… than the events which change our shapes or our standards of living…. From the educational, as opposed to the epistemological or the technological point of view, the way things are said is more important than the possession of truths" (Rorty 1979: p. 359). More to add, Rorty makes what he refers to as a "banal point" regarding the lifelong process of education: education must convey the orthodox attitudes of one's culture before beginning the process of edification; he then uses the example of two components of education—acculturation and edification—as an analogy for the idea of "systematic and edifying philosophies" (Rorty 1979: p. 366).

Moreover, in a chapter in Philosophy and Social Hope (1999) titled "Education as Socialisation and Individualization," Rorty combines the ideas of acculturation, education, and self-creation. The chapter serves as an illustration of how Rorty's views on truth impact his views on education. Rorty analyses how the political structure of education impacts how students think as they go from elementary and secondary school to college. According to him, there are two roughly defined degrees of education that are divided along opposing political axes. Rorty is of the opinion that education is for conservatives a means of gaining access to Truth (in the Platonic tradition of absolute Truth), which leads to freedom. For the left, education turns

the Platonic method on its head. First, education aids in liberation from society's stifling customs, and once liberated, truth becomes accessible. Conservatives believe that "conventional wisdom" (Rorty 2000: p. 116) equals to reason and that pupils should be indoctrinated with some of that wisdom, according to Rorty. On the other side, liberals believe that supporting conservative positions amounts to "betraying the students" (Rorty 2000: p. 116).

Now, human brains are not constructed beforehand and also, there is no underlying pre-programmed language, i.e. there is no such thing as human nature, for Rorty. He implicitly holds educators and educational theorists accountable for supplying and enhancing socialisation. According to Rorty, literature and literary criticism emphasise the need of a common language for the socialisation process, making language development the most crucial element of education. Rorty opines that once we give up the notion of human nature, it becomes possible to distinguish between private and public issues. For the ironist [The concept of the ironist is partially based on the denial of the necessity for theories that unite the objectives of the society and the individual's private interests], one's public and private selves which Rorty calls one's "final vocabulary" are distinct from one another and do not always correspond. By final vocabulary what Rorty means, is "a set of words which [people] employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives….They are the words in which we tell… the story of our lives" (Rorty 1989: p. 73).

Gafur's position serves as an example of the struggles today's underprivileged and disenfranchised people endure. India's marginalised populations continue to bear an unfair share of the burden of a conflict over religious and moral supremacy, a conflict that the country is still struggling with due to escalating communal unrest. And if Rorty's approach is taken into consideration, the youth of our society could morally respond to thousands of Ghafur present in India, today. He argues in Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, that a person's private self-creation matters shouldn't be in harmony with his or her public matters. Rorty challenges his audience to abandon their preconceived notions of faith and enter a realm of moral human potential where there is only love and hope for the human race as a whole. He referred to his imprecise, hazy, and muddled intersection of faith, hope, and love as "romance" and called it by a variety of titles, including "social hope," "religion of democracy," and "solidarity".

For educators, Rorty's concept of ironic self-creation has tremendous implications; instructors are now expected to assist pupils in creating their own private truths, and administrators are also expected to ensure literary immersive curriculum. Rorty defined education as the process of teaching someone how to build and renew themselves: "…we redescribe ourselves… in those terms and incorporate the results with alternative redescriptions which use the vocabularies of alternative figures…we ironists hope, by this continual redescription, to make the best selves for ourselves that we can" (Rorty 1989: pp. 79–80). Moreover, he accords that a society that values literature may maintain a high standard of life, one that is liberal in the sense that people are free from suffering and free to follow their own interests, as well as one that is liberal in terms of prospects for individual and societal wealth. For instance, Chattopadhyay's use of the drought as the setting for the plot of "Mahesh" is indicative of a humanitarian drought in which indifference goes unnoticed and the drought

in Kashipur is more than just a localised scarcity; it is also alluded to a troubling lack of social cohesion and empathy among individuals. "Mahesh" acts as a vehicle for challenging the relevance of the "moral asks" imposed on the oppressed against this backdrop of extreme poverty. Rorty contends that we are much more prone to include unknowable persons in our area of immediate moral concern when we come across fictitious characters that are very different from ourselves. We should be thinking in terms of "one of us" and "one of them" more frequently and our interest in the specifics of characters' lives helps us to expand our moral imagination.

Rorty considers social development in terms of more free time for people, less suffering, and more access to education as part of his liberal inclinations. In terms of how we talk and write, he also considers societal growth. According to him, the West's culture is steadily improving as new better methods of speaking and writing replace the outdated ones. Rorty makes it apparent that literary criticism is one of the keys to a liberal culture and the educational system that underpins it: "Literature and politics… are the areas to which we should look for the charter of a liberal society. We need a redescription of liberalism as the hope that culture as a whole can be 'poeticized' rather than as the Enlightenment hope that it can be 'rationalized' or 'scientized'"(Rorty 1989: p. 52).

Rorty imagines a society where we look to other people's works as the literature that directs us towards greater citizenship, the best of what has been written as well as the best that has been written about those texts in turn and metaphysical sources of moral instruction have been largely replaced by literature as "literature has replaced the sermon and the treatise as the principal vehicles of moral change and progress" (Rorty 1989: p. xvi). Thus, literature is seemingly replacing other sources of morality which for Rorty is a positive aspect, for the notions of truth have been set aside. According to Rorty, literary works have certain characteristics that make them effective teaching tools and examples for how to talk and write about the world. He writes on Proust, Nietzsche, and Heidegger in a chapter of Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity and argues that "novels are a safer medium than theory for expressing one's recognition of the relativity and contingency of authority figures" (Rorty 1989: p. 107). He calls them safer because theories have the potency to become universal while novels tend to be temporary. He writes, "Since the characters in novels age and die—since they obviously share the finitude of the books in which they occur—we are not tempted to think that by adopting an attitude toward them we have adopted an attitude toward every possible sort of person" (Rorty 1989: p. 107). Novels are transient affairs, as Rorty claims, but they may also have a seductive, possibly enduring, and impacting nature that theory and grand theories lack. As a result, educators must also exercise caution while using novels in the classroom.

The connection between literature and education is especially important as Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity (Chapter Seven), demonstrates to its readers a certain kind of a book that "help us see the effects of our private idiosyncrasies on others" (Rorty 1989: p. 141). He further adds that by reading books "we may come to notice what we ourselves have been doing… such books show how our attempts at autonomy, our private obsessions with the achievement of a certain sort of perfection, may make us oblivious to the pain and humiliation we are causing to others:

They are the books which dramatize the conflict between duties to the self and duties to others" (Rorty 1989: p. 141). If taught properly, literature has the capacity to instruct us on how we may live. It may serve as a metaphor for instruction. It has the potential to alter society rather than merely contributing to an individual's private self-perception or definition. In addition to that, it has the capacity to accomplish much more, and tales and narratives of all kinds may serve as the glue that holds everything together, particularly if we accept Rorty's view that there is no ultimate truth and that human nature is what it is. Reading and studying literature might help you stop creating, as "a culture that lacks integrity, one that offers no more than a simple-minded vocabulary for expressing personal preferences, or one that's merely a framework for making self-serving social contracts" (Rorty 1989: p. 9).

4 Conclusion

India is experiencing a spike in religious and racial tensions, and important festivals have recently been marred by a number of violent conflicts and processions. In several states of India, religious tensions reached a breaking point, resulting in a massive uprising of vigilante groups that destroyed homes, severely damaged public property, and disrupted public order. What is our fate, and what kind of humanity are we going to build, if there is no irrefutable truth, if there are no timeless ideals. Rorty's response to such questions would be that, this is the task of education,—"The search for truth is the search for the widest possible inter-subjective agreement" signified in its deepest and the most fundamental sense. For educational purposes, the concept of "truth" that refers to accurate depictions of the world "as it really is" is crucial. According to Rorty, abandoning representational conceptions of reality opens the door to the possibility of edifying, a type of education. Additionally, institutions may teach students flexibly and in ways that could progressively improve society by letting up the pursuit of truth in higher education.

Moreover, Rorty asserts that none of the correspondent truth is profound, philosophical, transitory, or universal, and as we've learnt if we take seriously the notion that literature is an effective teaching and learning instrument, his position would have a significant influence on education. Literature may replace or complement other authoritative sources. People outside the bubble of academia might participate in literary criticism as ironists, via an increasingly literary society to find their own authenticity and moral direction. A literary philosophy of education may be inferred from Rorty's theories on literature and education. It is better to live in a society that appreciates literary interpretation and reinterpretation than one that does not. If taught properly, literature has the capacity to instruct us on how we may live. It may serve as a metaphor for instruction. It has the potential to alter society rather than merely contributing to an individual's private self-perception or definition. We get to know a wider variety of fictitious characters, as well as a wider variety of ethical situations. By extending or deepening the moral abilities we already possess, literature teaches us moral principles. However, our interest in the specifics of the characters' lives

plays a major role in facilitating this extension. The argument makes the case that suspension of our beliefs during reading allows readers to gradually identify with differences that might otherwise seem insurmountable.

Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's short story "Mahesh" reflects themes that are firmly aligned with Richard Rorty's emphasis on the transformative power of literature and its potential to generate empathy and collective optimism. Reading "Mahesh" through the prism of Rorty's educational philosophical notion is a moving illustration of how literature may subvert social conventions, arouse moral imagination, and support the underprivileged. The narrative eloquently captures the misery and struggles endured by the marginalised of Indian society while drawing attention to the structural inequalities that exacerbate their plight. Gafur and Amina's challenges are highlighted in the narrative, underlining the injustices that the oppressed must endure and the effects that social systems have on people's lives.

Gafur, Amina, and their relationship with their bull Mahesh demonstrates resilience and perseverance in the face of hardship, despite the seemingly insurmountable difficulties they encounter. The characters by their shared struggle and encouragement of one another indicate the importance of solidarity and endurance in overcoming the challenges presented by social inequalities. Engaging with "Mahesh" through imagination allows readers to experience the characters' sorrows and put themselves in the character's shoes. The story's universal themes of love, loss, and sacrifice resonate with readers, generating a sense of harmony and belongingness. Through creative expression, empathy and a sense of solidarity with those who experience similar circumstances, are fostered.

By reading stories like "Mahesh," readers are prompted to consider the intricacies of social hierarchies, develop empathy for a range of experiences, and imagine a world that is more just and equal, which is found consistent with Rorty's philosophical theory that literature can act as a catalyst for social change and foster sense of communal solidarity. More to add, Rorty's theory of ironic self-creation highlights how literature can help people develop their capacity for empathy, critical thinking, and social awareness. And, understanding this narrative through the lens of Rorty's literary educational theory reveals how effectively literature may establish a common space by promoting empathy, hope, solidarity, and a deeper comprehension of human experiences, which could provoke contemplation regarding the necessity of societal change. Readers are able to relate to one other through the story's emotional and creative appeal, which shapes the possibilities of the common in a way that is consistent with Creative Commons philosophy, for a more connected and compassionate world can only be created through the open access to literature as a cultural resource.

The "Creative Common" theme highlights the possibility of mutual understanding and bonding that emerges from interacting with varied stories and characters in literature. Through literary analysis, individuals can break through barriers of social hierarchy and cultural differences and find common ground with others while also developing empathy and broadening their viewpoints. Readers can develop a sense of community and solidarity by immersing themselves in literary works that portray a variety of human experiences which fosters a common sense of humanity. "Mahesh" contributes to the idea of a Creative Commons and becomes a part of the shared

cultural tradition that is available to everyone. Stories and experiences become common resources in this shared narrative realm, enhancing empathy and understanding among all. By means of these collective themes and narratives, we can develop a common sense of identity and community, advancing the democratisation of information and promoting a more inclusive society.

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