

Laksaná and Deconstruction

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Twenty years ago I had explained the first two conditions or stages of *laksaná* as understood in Sanskrit poetics, by applying the concepts to a line and a half in an English poem, thus :¹

Vácyártha. The literal meaning, thwarted by the incongruity between the word's primary referent and the context. This is what happens in Hart Crane's lines

The dice of drowned men's bones he saw bequeath
An embassy. (At Melville Tomb)

The incongruity stung Harriet Monroe into writing and asking Hart Crane how dice could bequeath an embassy.

Laksyártha. The metaphorical or secondary meaning, obtained by substituting for the primary referent a secondary referent related to it. We thus effect transfer of meaning, relate the vehicle to the tenor and paraphrase the poetic metaphofatally. Hart Crane did this to his own metaphors when he cleared Harriet Monroe's puzzlement. "The dice of drowned men's bones" became "drowned men's bones ground into little cubes by the action of the sea"; "bequeath an embassy" became "washed ashore and offering evidence of messages about their experiences that the mariners might have had to deliver if they had survived".

One of the principal strategies of Deconstructive reading is to focus attention on the incongruity itself (the *mukhyárabádha*) rather than on the meaning obtainable as a result of its resolution (*arthápatti*). Jonathan Culler's elucidation of this strategy with reference to Paul de Man's ideas is in terms of what in Sanskrit would be called *anupapatti* and *laksyártha* and in English (as in my comments above) "the incongruity" and "the paraphrase".²

Close reading, for de Man, entails scrupulous attention to what seems ancillary or resistant to understanding. In his foreword to Carol Jacobs's *The Dissimulating Harmony* he speaks of paraphrase as "a synonym for understanding": an act which converts the strange into the familiar, 'facing up to apparent difficulties (be they of syntax, of figuration, or of experience) and... coping with them exhaustively and convincingly, but subtly eliding, concealing, and diverting what stands in the way of meaning. 'What would happen,' he asks, 'if, for once, one were to reverse the ethos of explication and try to be really precise, attempting a reading that would no longer blindly submit to the teleology of

controlled meaning'(pp.ix-x)? What would happen, that is, if instead of assuming that elements of the text were subservient instruments of a controlling meaning or total and governing attitude, readers were to explore every resistance to meaning? Primary points of resistance might be what we call rhetorical figures, since to identify a passage or sequence as figurative is to recommend transformation of a literal difficulty, which may have interesting possibilities, into a paraphrase that fits the meaning assumed to govern the message as a whole.

The versions of rhetorical reading offered in Sanskrit poetics and by Culler make strikingly similar assumptions about the two stages or processes involved. However, *laksaná* and Deconstruction are divergent descriptions of reading, because Deconstruction rejects the second process and concerns itself exclusively with the first, i.e., the "literal difficulty". In the same book from which a passage was excerpted at the beginning I had ventured a description of the *laksaná* phenomenon, which departs from Sanskrit poetics and seems now to have more in common with descriptions which have since been offered by Deconstructionists:³

The vehicle, its original reference intact, its identity inviolate, reigns supreme within the metaphor- and its relation to the tenor and its congruity with the context are ever imperfect. The vehicle disrupts the statement and arrests attention. "To shock the audience by the violence and inadequacy of the analogy" (as Martin Foss says, speaking of the "sick simile") is the true function of metaphor. Its premises being what they are, the Sanskrit theory of metaphor, while admitting the fact in fact of this shock, refrains from assigning any function to it and in fact provides for its quick resolution. Sanskrit poetics, like the classical poetry and drama from which it was evolved, is firmly committed to coherence and intelligibility. To us, however, the finding of a secondary meaning to remove the incongruity is but the establishing of rational meaning. The first tier (the disrupted statement) is the poem; the second (the meaning as it stands when the mess is cleared) is the paraphrase. Most of us would regard the latter as unimportant if not illegitimate. The shock is the thing.

This statement was made from premises and in terms that are different from, and indeed antecedent by several years to, those of Deconstruction. What is significant is the common ground which consists in a questioning of (to quote Culler again) 'our inclination to use notions of unity and thematic coherence to

exclude possibilities that are manifestly awakened by the language and that pose a problem⁴.

Possibilities that pose a problem are commonly awakened by the activity of figural structures in the text, and "rhetorical" reading which focuses attention on these is an important form of Deconstruction. Perhaps the best known example of Deconstructive criticism of this kind is Paul de Man's reading (offered in *Allegories of Reading*) of the following passage in Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* :

I had stretched out on my bed, with a book, in my room which sheltered, tremblingly, its transparent and fragile coolness against the afternoon sun, behind the almost closed blinds through which a glimmer of daylight had nevertheless managed to push its yellow wings, remaining motionless between the wood and the glass, in a corner, poised like a butterfly. It was hardly light enough to read, and the sensation of the light's splendor was given me only by the noise of Camus...hammering dusty crates; resounding in the sonorous atmosphere that is peculiar to hot weather, they seemed to spark off Scarlet stars; and also by the files executing their little concert, the chamber music of Summer: evocative not in the manner of a human tune that, heard perchance during the summer, afterwards reminds you of it; it is connected to summer by a more necessary link: born from beautiful days, resurrecting only when they return, containing some of their essence, it does not only awaken their image in our memory; it guarantees their return, their actual, persistent, unmediated presence.

The dark coolness of my room related to the full sunlight of the street as the shadow relates to the ray of light, that is to say it was just as luminous and it gave my imagination the total spectacle of the summer, whereas my senses, if I had been on a walk, could only have enjoyed it by fragments; it matched my repose which (thanks to the adventures told by my book and stirring my tranquility) supported, like the quiet of a motionless hand in the middle of a running brook, the shock and the motion of a torrent of activity.

De Man's reading shows that the passage is a "literary text which simultaneously asserts and denies the authority of its own rhetorical mode". On the one hand, there is the buzzing of the flies which is linked to summer by necessity and has appropriated some of its essence. On the other hand, there is the human tune, experienced by chance rather than necessity and linked to summer accidentally rather than essentially. Analogy and contiguity are the bases respectively

of metaphor and metonymy, and de Man points out that the necessity/chance opposition is one way of reaching the analogy/contiguity opposition and that 'the inference of identity and totality that is constitutive of metaphor is lacking in the purely metonymic contact'. Without naming metaphor or metonymy but indirectly by referring to their determining principles, the first paragraph affirms the binary opposition of the two and privileges metaphor over metonymy. In the earlier half of the second paragraph, the narrator claims, partly by implication, that "the substitutive totalization by metaphor" (de Man's words) reproduces - in his imagination and within the room - "the total spectacle of the summer" more effectively than actual sensory perception outdoors of metonymically related fragments of the spectacle could have. However, this "metafigural theory", positing the priority of metaphor over metonymy in terms of the categories of metaphysics and with reference to the act of reading (de Man's words again) is undermined by "the figural praxis" that follows. For, in the latter half of the paragraph, in order to give the claim made for metaphor some "persuasive power", the narrator employs metonymic structures such as (1) the phrase "torrent of activity" which being a cliché in French is not a metaphor but a metonymy embodying a contingent association, and (2) the occurrence of "torrent" and "running brook" in proximity. Thus on de Man's showing, "the assertion of the mastery of metaphor over metonymy" deconstructs itself, as it "owes its persuasive power to the use of metonymic structures".

As Jonathan Culler points out, de Man's 'close readings concentrate on crucial rhetorical structures in passages with a meta linguistic function or metacritical implications'. His reading of the Proust passage, in an attempt to establish that "the figural praxis and the metafigural theory do not converge", examines that theory and indicates the ontological status of metaphor/metonymy, equating it with analogy/contiguity, necessity/chance, essence/accident, and identity, totality/"relational contact". Clearly, this shows that Poststructuralism is as deeply concerned with the metaphor/metonymy dichotomy as Structuralism (chiefly in the person of Roman Jakobson) had been. The most authoritative pronouncement on it was Jakobson's essay "Two Aspects of Language and two Types of Aphasic Disturbances", equating it with or relating it to selection/combination and similarity/contiguity.

If I might end the easy, as I began it, on an egotistic note, I would like to mention that writing in the *Adyar Library Bulletin* in 1984, I had equated *gaunī laksanā* and *śuddhā laksanā* with, respectively, metaphor and metonymy as defined by Jakobson :⁵

But the front on which examination of *laksaná* (in sanskrit poetics has been most significantly productive concerns the relationship of the primary and secondary referents. A considerable number of possible relations have been isolated and defined, and several lists have been offered. It has, however, become increasingly clear that the possible relations fall into two categories. The first kind is based on *sáruṣya* or *sádrṣya* or *sádharanya* — what can be called similarity. The second kind consists of relations other than similarity— such as, to mention only three out of a large number, *samaváya* or *sáhacarya* (association), *sámúpya* or *sámnidhya* (proximity), and *tátsthya* (location). Sanskrit does not have a generic term except *sádrṣyetara* for relations other than similarity, but the English word "contiguity" would serve the purpose. The first kind has come to be known as *gauní laksaná* and the second as *śuddhá laksaná*.

I had also pointed out in the same essay that the examples which Ānandavardhan offers (in the *vrtti* on the 32nd and 33rd *kárikás* of *Uḍyota* III of *Dhvanyáloka*) for the two kinds of *gunavrtti* which he identifies, i.e., *abhedopacárarúpa* (based on absolute identity) and *laksanáruṣpa* (based on secondary meaning) can also serve as examples of *gauní* and *śuddhá* respectively.

I think I was the first to point out that both in Sanskrit poetics and in Jakobson's theory, similarity (or identity) and contiguity are recognized as the constitutive principles of metaphor and metonymy respectively, although it is possible that some earlier critic that I am not aware of did notice and draw attention to this remarkable parallelism. I must add that when viewed as an undifferentiated phenomenon involving any transfer of meaning, all *laksaná*s can be equated with metaphor as has been done at the beginning of this essay. When, however, *laksaná* is viewed as of two kinds - based on similarity and on contiguity - only the former kind is to be equated with metaphor as has been done in the foregoing paragraph.

The *laksaná* theory and Jakobson's formulation agree in rejecting the notion that metaphor and metonymy are merely tropes and in setting them up as fundamental mutually exclusive semantic categories. However, while Jakobson believes that they between them exhaust all discourse and that any discourse that is not metaphoric is metonymic and vice versa, the position in Sanskrit poetics is that *laksaná* is one among three meaning functions and that there are effects or modes of discourse accounted for either by *abhidhá* or by *vyañjaná*.

If Deconstruction (represented by Derrida and the Yale set) is one face of Poststructuralism, the other face is Lacanian Psychoanalysis which is a rewriting

of Freud. To mention an important concept, Freud had identified condensation and displacement as two processes involved in dream-work which converts the latent content into the manifest content. Developing the notion that "the unconscious is structured like a language", Lacan describes metaphor and metonymy - the two primary operations of language, as defined by Jakobson- as identical with condensation and displacement respectively. Metaphor and condensation work by similarity (which is the basis of *gauní laksaná*), while metonymy and displacement work by contiguity or association (which is the basis of *suddhá laksaná*). Thus the bipolarity marked by the two types of *laksaná* has proved constitutive of certain pairs of categories fundamental to modern linguistics, literary theory and psychoanalysis.

REFERENCES

1. Krishna Rayan, *Suggestion and Statement in Poetry* (London 1972) p.75.
2. Jonathan Culler. *On Deconstruction* (London 1983) pp. 242-243.
3. Krishna Rayan. op. cit.. p.77.
4. Jonathan Culler, op.cit.. p.247.
5. *The Adyar Library Bulletin* (Madras 1984), vol.48. p.31.