CHAPTER - 2

Semiotics : Nature and Scope
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2.1 Introduction :

"Semiotics" as the name suggests, seems to be the study of signs. As Peirce - an American pragmaticist of the late 19th century - has defined it; "a quasi-necessary or formal doctrine of signs - it is the doctrine of the essential nature and fundamental varieties of semiosis". (quoted in Jain, 1994 : 284). Thus, 'semiosis' may be the sign-process per se, which includes sign-using behaviour of all beings as a whole, i.e. the use of words, tones of voice, tempo, body-motions and gestures, and animal communication. The signs are usually natural - there may be a natural relation between the sign and its meaning, as in a human cry of pain or in bees. Signs can also be arbitrary as are most of the words in natural languages and tail-wagging among animals - the meaning of which varies for cats, dogs, and horses (of. The new Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th edition. Vol. IX).
2.2 Sign, Symbol, Index, Icon, Symptom

The history of the theory of signs (known as "semiotics") can be traced back to the work of Stoic philosophers. (cf. Lyons, 1977:99) According to Meier-Oeser (p.13), the Stoic theory of sign, delineated in the late 4th and 3rd century BC., could be called, even if there are some important anticipations in Aristotle and the Megarian Logic, the first fully elaborate theory of sign in the western tradition. And yet it is open to dispute whether it is at all a part or even more the starting point of that tradition which finally led to the modern concept of semiotics as a "general theory of signs, sign-processes and sign-systems in nature and culture". For it is true that the Stoic theory of sign in its proper meaning or its technical sense (Sameion) was never designed for such a general purpose. And even more, such an objective would have been hardly conceivable for the stoics as well as for any other ancient philosophical school, because that presupposes a concept of sign which is not - at least not as a technical term - to be found in Greek or Latin antiquity, namely a concept that would include both the natural sign of inference (the indexical sign) and the conventional linguistic sign (the symbol) as instances or
It was Augustinus (as advocated by Meier-Oeser), who introduced the general notion of sign in the late 4th century, which later became effective in the western tradition of semiotics and ultimately stimulated or made possible the development of semiotics as a comprehensive science of all kinds of sign in nature and culture. Augustinus has used two notions 'semaninon' (the linguistic sign) and 'semeion' (the inferential sign) related to semiotics and further explains them. Thus, "semaninon" or the linguistic signs deal with the spoken sentence, e.g. "This man has a wounded heart"; the meaning or proposition expressed by the sentence; and that what happens, i.e. the heart of the man being wounded. "What is said" or the meaning is incorporeal whereas the other two elements are corporeal. This fact puts the 'lakton' in an exceptional position within the physicalistic or materialistic ontology advocated by Stoics attempting to describe everything - even things like God, soul, wisdom, truth or thought - as material bodies. (Meier-Oeser, 14)

On hearing the word 'sign' (or 'semeion'), we first
think of traffic lights, footprints, gestures or linguistic expressions. But the Stoic sign is defined as "a proposition which forms the (pre-) antecedent in a valid conditional (that is a complex proposition of the form "if this, then that ") which serves to reveal the consequent".

Now coming to the Peircean theory of signs, we find that the word 'semiotics' (originally 'semiotic') actually originated in Greek medicine for diagnosis by means of bodily symptoms and Peirce's definition of semiotics is based on his assumption of the term 'sign'. He writes:

"A sign or representation is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the representation". (Charles S. Peirce, in Hartshorne and Weiss, 1931-5, 227-226.)
Peirce divided the different sorts of signs into three mutually intersecting trichotomies (Laver and Trudgill, 1979:2). The second trichotomy is most relevant here that consists of symbols, icons and indices.

Feibleman (1946-90) provides a useful condensed version of his writings. Thus, the **symbol** is "a sign, which refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas, which operates to cause the symbol to be interpreted as referring to that object" (2,249); the **icon** is "a sign, which refers to an object by virtue of characters of its own which it possesses whether the object exists or not" (2,247); and the **index** is "a sign, which refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that object". (2,248)

Obviously, there is no sharp distinctive borderline between the terms and this is why there are differences in interpretations by different scholars. Ogden and Richards (1923:23) for example, distinguish symbols as "those signs which men use to communicate with one another". The oftquoted triangle of signification proposed by Ogden and
Richards (1923:11) has created a lot of controversies among philosophers, linguists, and psychologists. The triadic relation has been shown as below:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{B (Concept)} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{(symbol) A} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{C (significatum)} \\
\end{array}
\]

Peirce's (1940 : 104) contention is based on the conventional nature of the relation between sign and significatum, but Morris (1946 : 23-7) views that

"a symbol is a sign" which acts as substitute for some other sign with which it is synonymous", and that "all signs not symbols are signals".

Cherry (1957 : 7) uses the word 'sign' for "any physical event used in communication " and 'symbol' for "religious and cultural " purposes interpretable only in specified historical contexts (cf. Lyons, 1977 : 95).
Saussure (1916) views the relation between a sign and its significatum arbitrary. This 'arbitrariness' is the basis for different signs for different languages on the one hand, and different interpretations of the same sign in the same language on the other. Thus, to Saussure, 'meaning' was a relationship between two equally participating characteristics (the objects, ideas, etc. on the one hand, and the language used to refer to them on the other). (Crystal, 1985-161)

That linguistic signs are 'arbitrary', is by no means easy to explain, since the arbitrariness calls for multidimensional approach to unfathom the hidden truth in the linguistic sign itself and the mind of the user both depending on the context of situation or convention. Thus, 'arbitrary' and 'conventional' are seldom equivalent (cf. Lyons, 1977 : 101).

Peirce's definition of 'symbol' that indicates an intermediary link between the signifies and the signified is the 'interpretant', which, however, is the 'link' of Ogden and Richards and the 'associative bond' of Saussure and is far from being non-controversial, since it is 'mental' and liable
to change from one person to another and even in one mood of the individual to another. This is why a language is a heterogeneous system by virtue of being different and varied in nature.

Whereas the symbol is an arbitrary sign, the icon, as Peirce defines, is non arbitrary. Peirce distinguishes icons from symbols as under:

"An icon is a sign which would possess the character which renders it significant even though its object had no existence: such as a lead-pencil streak as representing a geometrical line ... A symbol is a sign which would have the character which renders it a sign if there were no interpretant. Such is any utterance of speech which signifies what it does only by virtue of its being understood to have that signification". (1940: 104)

Iconicity is based on resemblance between form and meaning and this is described as 'primary iconicity' (Lyons, 1977: 103) and very likely it is 'medium-dependent' (Ibid.). e.g. the English word 'cuckoo' is iconic
in the phonic medium. The second type of iconicity is that which is based on an extension of meaning from a basic to a transferred, idiomatic, suggested, or metaphorical sense. This is 'secondary iconicity'. Unlike 'symbolic', as Lyons suggests, 'iconic' has the advantage of not having a different non-technical sense outside semiotics (Ibid.).

The third main category of signs is the 'index', which Peirce defines as under:

"An index is a sign which would, at once, lose the character which makes it a sign if its object were removed, but would not lose that character if there were no interpretant" (1940: 104).

Here, Peirce takes the index to a non-arbitrary sign, e.g. the orientation of a weathercock would indicate the wind-direction and the height of a column of mercury in a thermometer would be an index of high temperature, etc. As regards the human speech, the connection between an index (word) and its object (meaning) is likely to be arbitrary (cf. Laver and Trudgill, 1979: 3) Abercrombe (1967: 7) uses the term 'indices' to refer to signs which reveal personal
characteristics of the writer or speaker", which Bühler and other Prague school linguists have called 'expressive' that falls within the province of stylistics -- a branch of semiotics or linguistics (cf. Lyons, 1977 : 107)

Lyons (1977 : 108) has used another term in addition to the three mentioned above, viz. 'Symptom' close to the sense used in medicine, and it was of the art of diagnosis, by interpreting symptoms as signs, that the word 'semiotic' was first used in Greek (cf. Morris, 1946 : 285)

There is another term akin to 'sign', i.e. 'signal', which, however, differs, in its nature and interpretation, from all others discussed above. Apart from being used in its general sense of 'sign', 'signal' is time-bound according to Potter (1960 : 46) whereas 'symbol' is timeless (Ibid.,).

The use of terminology relating to 'sign' and its types has been tabulated by Allerton (1979 : 20), which focuses how idiosyncratic is the terminology of different scholars (actually the propagators) :
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall term</th>
<th>Every day term</th>
<th>Peirce</th>
<th>Ogden and Richards</th>
<th>De Saussure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o Items standing for or indicating another item</td>
<td>? Sign</td>
<td>Sign</td>
<td>Sign</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individually term</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Item taken as evidence or indication of another (casually connected) item</td>
<td>sign</td>
<td>index</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Item used as arbitrary sign for individual item</td>
<td>symbol, sign</td>
<td>index</td>
<td>symbol</td>
<td>signe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(name label)</td>
<td>(name label)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Item used as arbitrary sign for whole class</td>
<td>symbol, sign</td>
<td>symbol</td>
<td>symbol</td>
<td>signe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(word/name,label)</td>
<td>symbol, sign</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Item used (for specific purpose) as motivated sign for class</td>
<td>symbol,</td>
<td>icon</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>symbole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>icon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In short, a sign must have meaning. If there is no meaning then at best we are dealing not with a sign but with a pattern, and at worst with a mere mark or noise.
2.3 Semiotics as the Study of Signs

To discuss semiotics as the study of science is not so easy. However, Morris (1938 : 1946) recognises three main areas in the field of semiotics: syntactics (syntax), semantics, and pragmatics (cf. Lyons, 1977 : 114). The distinctions drawn by different scholars are far from precise. Nonetheless, by way of comparison one may be able to distinguish the three areas.

Morris (1938 : 6) has defined syntactics as the study of the formal relations of signs to one another; semantics as the study of the relations of signs to objects to which the signs are applicable, and pragmatics as the study of relations of signs to interpreters.

Carnap's distinction of the three areas of semiotics is close to that of Morris' (1942 : 9):

"If in an investigation explicit reference is made to the speaker or ... the user of the language, then we assign it to the field of pragmatics ... ; If we abstract from the user of the language and analyse
only the expressions and their designata, we are in the field of semantics. And if, finally, we abstract from the designates also and analyse only the relations between the expressions, we are in (logical) syntax.

It seems clear from Carnap's definition of pragmatics that he stresses the point of view of the producer or user rather than the receiver, whereas Morris takes it as the effects of signs on the interpreter (cf. Lyons, 1977: 115).

Smith (1966: 4-5) later defines these terms as follows:

"... syntactics studies how signs are related to each other semantics studies how these signs are related to things. And pragmatics studies how they are related to people (i.e. the effects of signs on people)" (p. 519).

The areas that semiotics covers is not limited to what is generally taken for granted as is attested by the efforts made by different linguists, psychologists, and
behaviouristic scientists from time to time. There is a growing awareness of the language aspects of art which prepared the ground for a fruitful use of the ideas of semiotics in the study of artistic culture. The semiotics of art and aesthetics activity is an important department of modern aesthetics. In art, the system of meanings and senses of sounds take the form of the artistic image which in terms of semiotics is an artistic statement. This type of statement carries artistic, universally human, non-utilization information. While being of the nature of a sign in its origin and being expressed by signs the artistic image is not itself a sign. The artistic text is a combination of images, a system of artistic statements that form an artistic message. The sign is the minimal unit of an artistic text. The difference between the signs and the utterances is that in the process of communication the signs must be recognised and the utterance understood. The system of statements (utterances) constitutes an artistic text whose semantic context - the artistic conception - must be interpreted and evaluated.

An artistic text appears by transition from the level of signs to the level of object-semantic context. The attitude to the world and its values contained in the art work is
realised in disappearing signs, in a sign system that dissolves itself. An artistic text refers us not to language but to the interpenetrating materiality and spirituality in the inner world of the work.

The structure of an artistic text is formed of artistic images and the latter are made up of signs. However, every transition to a higher level (from signs to artistic statement, i.e. to image, from a system of images to artistic text) involves a qualitative leap, a resolution of the preceding level and the emergence and addition of a new quality of sense and new meanings of artistic thought.

The artistic text (a closed system) acquires the status of an art work (open system) in the process of social being, in the process of cultural communication. The art work, being a minimal unit, as element of artistic culture, is a sign of artistic culture, or rather, its meta-sign, i.e. a sign carrying a higher semantic context and broader object meaning than ordinary signs of which the image is built. Artistic culture as an entity is made up of meta-signs, i.e. art works.
The dialectics of the artistic process is extremely complex. It combines sign and non-sign elements: signs, through a qualitative leap, shape into an artistic statement, i.e. an artistic image (a non-sign entity): the images make up an artistic text (another leap), whose inclusion in social functioning makes it an art work, a meta-sign of artistic culture. A meta-sign (art work) has sense (artistic conception) and object meaning (value for mankind).

Semiotics interprets the language-communicative aspects of the artistic process. Style in terms of semiotics is the phenomenon of "a diversity of languages within a language", as recognition of basic equivalence of various styles, as the possibility, within certain limits, of translating the sense of a statement from one micro-language (style) into another. The translatability of style (similar to translation from one language into another with the preservation of the original sense) is readily observed in the performing arts where the same work can be performed in different styles. Within the same language (macro-system) there exist stylistic varieties (micro-languages), and in that sense artistic culture presents us with stylistic diversity just like multilingualism. The semiotic approach to style in art
detects and interprets an author's 'hand', the 'pronunciation' of the signs of the artistic culture' (Bores, 1981: 287-288)

Semiotics may be widely used in detecting the social markers, physical markers, and psychological markers in the speech of an individual just like the height of a column of mercury in a thermometer would be an index marker of heat or temperature (cf. Laver & Trudgill, 1979: 1-32).

This is an age of advertisements. Advertising a product means inviting people to purchase that product and semiotics would prove most useful in the search of how a product be audio-visually represented so as to impress people at its best.

To conclude, the sign being a functional aspect of an object or event, its study goes as far as one can expect, such as silence, pause, etc. in which we have no physical object or event that might function as sign.
2.4 Semiotic Approach to Literary Studies

Literature is a verbal art. No piece of literature is possible without language, but unfortunately language has been, so far, treated as the "vehicle of literary communication and thus, it has been made secondary. The result is that, studies and research are all based on themes unrelated to language and literariness. For example, there are studies that are entitled as social, psychic, psychoanalytic, historical aspects.

Semiotics being the study of signs can study creative literature in its realizing, because a piece of literary work is not the amalgam of words; rather it is a unique interplay of signs, that are called images, figures, fantasies, symbols, similes, metaphors, icons, index, symptoms etc. which need be based on some concrete ground such as semiotics. Furthermore, the symbols in art and the art symbols call for studies different from the traditional ones.

The reader-writer relationship plays a vital role in aesthetic communication. The same text may be appreciated
differently because of different presupposition and implications. Semiotics here helps a lot to deal with literary studies as it were, by way of providing techniques and approaches inherent in language study, today known as structuralism, post-deconstruction, contextualism etc.

Style is no doubt, the main but it results in the whole work of art in terms of his (the author's) language i.e. phraseology, imagination, symbolification, idioms, proverbs, figures of speech all depending upon the choice of themes and specific words with its specific sounds in different collocations.

Contemporary writings cannot be studied in its entirety unless it has some root in the past, not because the themes and the objectives emerge from the past, but the so-called myths and the words themselves are solely based on the interpretation of the past.