INTRODUCTION

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"Bertrand Russell is a philosopher without a philosophy. The same point might be made by saying that he is a philosopher of all philosophies."[1] Bertrand Russell (1872 –1970) has been the philosopher of the twentieth century. At least he is one of the most widely known and studied philosophers. The only contender for the same could be his famous pupil Ludwig Wittgenstein. I have great respect for Russell not only as a great philosopher but as an immensely humane person as well. Russell was one of the most remarkable human beings, a genius who wrote on a variety of subjects ranging from science, mathematics, fiction and drama to even politics. A.J. Ayer writes about him, "Bertrand Russell is not only the most brilliant philosopher of this century; he is also one of the most self-critical."[2]

It should be of interest to note Rabindranath Tagore's account of his meeting with Russell. Tagore records the meeting in his travelogue in Bengali, called *Pather Sanchaya*. He met Russell in the garden of Lowes Dickinson's (an English philosopher) house at Cambridge. It was an after–dinner rendezvous. Russell joined the conversation, and talked brilliantly spanning literature, sociology, and philosophy at large. Tagore mused that the rigour of mathematics renders

many a man's mind arid and dry, bereft of a sense of humour; but Russell was an exception. Mathematics had enlightened Russell's mind, made it effulgent and luminous. His deeper thoughts were interspersed with a great deal of hearty laughter. This is what made Tagore marvel at and admire about Russell's conversational style. The meeting took place in 1912.

Bertrand Arthur William Russell was born on 18th May, 1872, in a distinguished family of British Earls and Dukes. Third Earl Russell received the Noble Prize for literature in 1950. Besides being a master of critical thinking, he was a civil rights activist and a prominent public figure of that period. This is recorded in the following observation:

> ... beside being a philosopher, he is a ready and graceful writer with opinions of his own on most topics. He has an acute, inventive and original intelligence; he has given a fresh turn to almost every important philosophical problem; he is the remarkably unsolemn and unpretentious doyen of contemporary English philosophy... [3]

Russell's interest in philosophical problems started as early as 1883 or 1884 (i.e., when he was about eleven years old). He was dissatisfied with the axioms of Euclid's Geometry at that time, and in a way, this dissatisfaction may be said to have led him to write *The Principles of Mathematics*. At about the age of fifteen he started considering a number of philosophical problems such as freewill,

materialism and the existence of God, arising out of his immense interest in religion.

In 1890 a breakthrough came in Russell's life when he came to study mathematics at Trinity College, Cambridge. There he first came into contact with professional philosophers and mathematicians like, A. N. Whitehead, McTaggart, James Ward and G.F. Stout. In his own words, "Cambridge opened up to me a new world of infinite delight."[4]

In 1895, Russell became a fellow at Trinity. In Cambridge he also met one of his slightly younger contemporaries, G.E. Moore. During Russell's undergraduate years the prevailing atmosphere of British philosophy was Hegelean Idealism and upon Moore's influence he acknowledges to have gradually emerged from his idealist bath. In July 1900, Russell met Giuseppe Peano, the Italian logician and mathematician at the International Congress of Philosophy. Peano has also played an important role in the formation of Russell's philosophy of mathematics.

The other influences upon him were of Frege, Mill, Hume and last but not the least, Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein's criticisms helped Russell in transforming his ideas and reshaping his theories. In fact both of them learnt a great deal from each other. Russell claims that his lectures on Philosophy of Logical Atomism,

"... are very largely concerned with explaining certain ideas which, I learnt from my friend and former pupil Ludwig Wittgenstein."[5]

Writing on their relation Sainsbury says, "had Wittgenstein never existed there would be nothing inexplicable about Russell's work being as it in fact was".[6] In 1916, Russell was dismissed from his services at Trinity for his pacifist activities, and in 1918, was jailed for six months for having written that the US Army was accustomed to intimidating strikers. But he returned to Trinity College, Cambridge as a Fellow in 1944. Since that time he devoted himself fully to writing and published an enormous number of books and articles on a variety of subjects, besides those of philosophical interests. Russell "had a courageous insistence on expressing his opinion, no matter how unpopular his ideas may be."[7]

I became interested in philosophical analysis when I was introduced to analytical philosophy during my undergraduate classes. In my post-graduate years I became acquainted, for the first time, with Russell's philosophical ideas, which have 'fashioned the philosophical climate in English speaking countries'. Russell's main works can be presented under three headings: First, Philosophical Logic, which is actually a method of Russellean philosophy; second, the foundations of mathematics; third, epistemology and metaphysics.

The doctrines, which came under the head of the famous "Theory of Descriptions", drew my immediate attention. The problems of reference have intrigued me ever since. The present dissertation is concerned with the age-old problems of referring, denoting and naming that revolve round Russell's celebrated "Theory of Descriptions". Wittgenstein describes the Theory of Descriptions as "undoubtedly Russell's greatest contribution to philosophy", and F.P. Ramsey says, "It is a paradigm of philosophy."

An exploration into this topic involves studying the theories of other eminent philosophers like Meinong, Frege and Strawson. The debate between Russell and Strawson regarding reference is indeed very illuminating. Moreover Russell's treatment of these problems involves a certain view as to the task of philosophical analysis. The present project thus is an attempt at a statement and an evaluation of Russell's theory of descriptions and some related issues.

In the first chapter, I have sketched the historical background of analytic philosophy. I have tried to trace its origin and development over the years. Analytic philosophy has gradually established itself as a distinct and important branch of philosophy. This chapter throws light on why and how the analytical method became more and more acceptable and popular among philosophers as a way of philosophical thinking. Since the twentieth century philosophers have realized that language is very much related to philosophy and plays a

significant role in its progress. Regarding the use of language in the realm of philosophy there has been a longstanding bifurcation among those who are doing philosophy. One group, the formalists, went for the structural analysis of language such that it is free from the vagueness and inaccuracies that involve our common speech. The main exponent of this kind of modified language was Bertrand Russell. The other group headed by P.F. Strawson, however, proposes the refinement of ordinary language, which will be easier and more manageable. In short, I have taken note of the views of some prominent philosophers of both the groups.

The second chapter introduces the problem of reference. The 'puzzles of reference', as they are popularly known, were first stated by Russell in "On Denoting" (1905). But actually the problems are much older than that. We find that Plato had been concerned with some of them. Two of Russell's renowned predecessors, Meinong and Frege had also recognized the problems and attempted to solve them. In fact, Meinong was mainly concerned with the puzzle of negative existential statements, whereas Frege was interested in the puzzle of identity. In this chapter I have presented the problems in the form they arose not only for Russell but also for Plato, Meinong and Frege. Strawson's views on the subject open up a new vista in this field. An introduction to Strawson's theory has also been given in this chapter.

Meinong and his works influenced Russell to a great extent during the early years when Russell just got acquainted with the problems of referring and denoting. The puzzles (the puzzle of negative existentials in particular) apparently had not worried Russell initially. His thoughts at that time were in total agreement with those of Meinong. In order to solve this puzzle Meinong was led to accept a notion of subsistence. It was argued by Meinong that we could speak about 'the golden mountain', 'the round square' etc. and can make true statements of which these are subjects; hence they must have some kind of logical being. Such things will not be said to exist; they are rather subsistent entities. Meinong called them ideal objects.

Meinong is a philosopher who has largely been misunderstood by most philosophers including Russell. Though he initially supported Meinong, Russell later thought that in trying to solve the problem of negative existential statements, Meinong had abandoned his sense of reality. Meinong, according to Russell, admitted such things as chimeras, unicorns and even round squares. This was intolerable for Russell and he devised his theory of descriptions for solving the puzzles of reference as an acceptable alternative to Meinongean excesses. The second chapter impartially explores Meinong's theory and reflects upon Russell's early views.

The third chapter is an exposition of Frege's theory of sense and reference. Frege had made this famous and controversial distinction regarding proper names, while attempting to provide an answer to the problem of identity. Frege was a great mathematician and came to philosophy from this background. The special character of Russell's theory is best understood and approached when seen against the background of Frege's distinction between proper names and predicate expressions. In Frege's opinion proper names stand for something complete, they have sense associated with them. Concept words and relation expressions are incomplete.

Though Russell leans on this distinction, his acceptance and use of it is not precisely the same as that in which Frege understood it. Frege concluded that this puzzle over identity arises out of confusion between the sense and reference of expressions. Russell thought that the difficulty over identity rested on another confusion — that between proper names and definite descriptions. Russell rejects Frege's theory on the ground that it is purely arbitrary.

Chapter four is basically concerned with criticism of Meinong and Frege's theories by Russell. I have shown what initiated Russell into devising the theory of descriptions because, for Russell, rejecting the theories of his predecessors meant paving the path for his own theory. Arguments and counter arguments in favour of their theories are closely followed.

According to Russell, denoting phrases are in fact descriptions; they are certainly not names. But, Meinong commits this mistake of treating any grammatically correct denoting phrase as genuine objects or names. Russell advances several arguments to establish that descriptions are not names because a loss of this distinction is at the root of several problems.

Though Russell criticizes Frege's theory, he admires certain points in it, which influence him while formulating the theory of description. I feel that not all the objections that Russell brought against Frege are justified. Some of them arise out of certain confusions on Russell's part, which I have pointed out in this chapter thus coming to the conclusion that Frege's theory cannot be denied only because it stands in opposition to Russell's view.

Chapter five deals with Russell's ideas on proper names and existence. In this context Frege's view of proper names is also considered. I trace the origin of proper names here, bifurcating between the sense and no sense theories of proper names. Plato and Wittgenstein's conceptions of proper names have also come under discussion as a relevant issue. This chapter makes a comparison between what Russell and Frege say on the relation between proper names and descriptions. For Russell, names are 'disguised' or 'truncated' descriptions. Frege did not fully agree with this. Frege advocated the sense theory of names

without accepting the description theory. However, here lies a common platform from where both Russell and Frege's theories take off.

This chapter also contains an exposition into Russell's analysis of definite and indefinite descriptions. How Russell solves some of the puzzles with the help of his theory is also explained.

In the next chapter, that is, Chapter six, I turn to Strawson's criticism of Russell's position. Strawson's criticism of the theory of descriptions consists in a rejection of the theory of meaning underlying it. In Strawson's opinion no words or expressions have as their meaning a designated object. So, if meaning is not denotation, then there cannot be 'logically proper names' or 'descriptions' in Russell's sense. According to Leonard Linsky, the article, "On Referring", in which Strawson criticizes Russell, "is a landmark in contemporary philosophy and among the most important papers published in our time". [8]

The prime objective of Strawson's paper is to refute Russell's "On Denoting". The controversies involving Russell and Strawson's theories are evaluated in the sixth chapter, where the inherent dispute is about alternative ways of doing philosophy. I also bring to light a few complications related to names and reference which, Russell's theory cannot explain satisfactorily. My submission here is that though Strawson's paper is acclaimed very highly, it fails as an

attack on Russell's thesis to a certain extent. However, some of the objections that Strawson brought against Russell are justified though Russell thinks them to be untenable.

The topic of reference has exercised philosophers since. All other philosophers interested in the subject line up along the Fregean and Russellean positions. Sometimes it seems that the last word has been said, but, again, like the mythological bird Phoenix, which takes rebirth from its own ashes, the issue of reference comes back again and again to life with fresh problems. The generations of younger philosophers, with their thinking perform the task of carrying on the torch handed over by their predecessors. So, in my concluding Chapter, I discuss some recent researches on name and reference. I take into account Leibnitz's principle of substituitivity and the opinion of Quine, Frege and Russell about it. Unlike Frege, Quine thinks that names do not have any reference at all in certain anomalous contexts. He also does away with Russell's distinction between proper names and descriptive phrases. Quine only talks about an undifferentiated category of singular terms.

Keith Donnellan has examined the theories of Russell and Strawson carefully and while doing so he shows that a distinction is to be made between two kinds of use of descriptions. I thought it quite relevant to discuss Donnellan's distinction here and make a critical assessment of it. Donnellan's theory is novel

in its treatment of the problem yet when closely examined, it reveals certain confusions, which cannot be properly sorted out.

Another philosopher who has impressed me through his theory on proper names is Saul Kripke. He has given a new twist to the concept of proper names by raising the question of names being rigid or non-rigid designators. I seek to explain here what he means by these terms and why he thinks proper names to be rigid designators. The most significant achievement of Kripke's theory is that it has far reaching consequences.

Lastly, I evaluate the pros and cons of Russell and Strawson's doctrines, which are central to my thesis. In my consideration, Russell remains unsuccessful in his primary objective of constructing the theory of descriptions. He cannot provide satisfactory solutions to the problem of reference. On the other hand, Strawson is also confused in his criticism of Russell. However, Strawson is correct in saying as against Russell that a statement is neither true nor false. But the point is that though Strawson correctly points out some mistakes in the theory of descriptions, still he cannot disprove Russell's theory. I think that a synthesis of Russell and Strawson is not impossibility.

In the end, I have reached the general conclusion (and in this respect I take side with Strawson) that of course, common speech is full of vagueness and

inaccuracies but the degree of precision and measurement found in sciences and mathematics cannot be brought to philosophy.

Russell constructed a formal language for philosophy. This meant transforming whole philosophical inquiry into a formal language, which would be a stupendous task, giving rise to fresh problems. So, following Strawson, I go for ordinary language philosophy, which requires the careful refinement of common speech.

> It might be said that it was the duty of a commentator to remove such purely verbal confusion by providing a kind of dictionary, whereby Russell's use of a word at one time can be translated in terms of his use of it at another. Such lexicography has appeared as an obvious first step in philosophical scholarship ever since Moore's *Principia Ethica*; and Russell himself frequently prefaces a philosophical discussion with an attempt to define his terms. But I do not think this is the best way of trying to avoid the kind of vagueness which, as Russell rightly insisted, is unavoidable in ordinary language. [9]

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Notes and References :

1. A. Wood, <u>Summary and Introduction</u> of *Russell's Philosophy* (unfinished), included in B. Russell's *My Philosophical Development*, London: Routledge, 1993, p. 192.

2. A.J. Ayer, comment on *My Philosophical Development* (MPD), *op.cit.*, title page.

3. Review of *MPD* in Birmingham Post, *op.cit.*, *Ibid.*

4. P.A. Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell,* New York: Harper & Row, 1963, p. 8. Quoted in *Russell* by R.M. Sainsbury in Arguments of the Philosophers series, T. Honderich (ed.), London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, p. 1.

5. *Russell, op.cit., p. 11.*

6. *Ibid,* p. 12.

7. R.R. Ammerman, *Classics Of Analytic Philosophy*, New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1965, p. 401.

8. L. Linsky, *Referring,* London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967, p. xvii.

9. P.A. Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell, op.cit.,* p 690; Quoted in *MPD, op.cit.,* p. 204.

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