

Elements of Linguistics in the Indian Philosophy

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In a knowledge-oriented society, the knowledge of language and its function has remained the area of concern through centuries. In such investigations, it has raised several issues which are still object of enquiry. In the Indian intellectual tradition, the origin of language study and its different branches are rooted in the source civilizational texts like the *Vedas*¹ and the *āgamas*².

Nyāya and *Vaiśeṣika* advocate linguistic realism the history of which can be traced back to the *upaniṣadic* texts. According to the *Naiyāyikas*, if the world and language are created by the same will of God, then world – creation and language-creation begins at the same time. God's will be efficiency (śakti) of language. Language consists of words and words consist of letters. So, words and letters like root (prakṛti), suffix (pratyaya) and particle (nipāta) are endowed with efficiency. The *Nyāya* linguists do not recognize that words are eternal (nitya). They also revise to recognize that the relation between words and referents is impersonal. Because for them words are non-eternal as they are produced and have a beginning from the personal God. When God wills in the form of language that the endowed with efficiency, it takes the form of *mantras*, *brāhmaṇas*, *Vedāṅgas* etc. which beat the sentient element of God. The principle of causality is also employed by the *Naiyāyikas* in the linguistic plan. If the presence or absence of one word invariably follows the presence or absence of another, then the relation between the two words would be considered as cause and effect. A mere word can not be cause of verbal cognition; it is knowledge of words that may give rise to the cognition of others by means of inherence (samavāya). Therefore, the knowledge of words is the instrumental cause. The recollection (smaraṇa) by means of denotative function is an operation (vyāpāra) and verbal cognition (śabda bodha) is the

result. Thus, by means of recollected word-meaning, the understanding of the knowledge of words and that of relations constitute the cause of linguistic cognition according to the *Naiyāyikas*.

The philosophy of language of the *Naiyāyikas* is also supported by their logical theory. According to them words have power to signify existent objects. The term *padārtha* (category) in *Nyāya* means the meaning of words (*Padasya artha*). The categories like substance, quality, action, class, particularity, inherence, non-existence is objects (*arthas*) that are denoted by words. The *Nyāya* categories like *pramāṇa*, *prameya*, *saṁśaya*, *prayojana*, *dr̥stānta*, *siddhānta*, *avayava* etc. are also the meanings of one word or other as they are signified by means of efficient words. Determinate perceptions also depend upon the language units like subject, predicate, this, that, difference, relations etc. So as to afford a fuller knowledge of as object. *Nyāya* is mostly known for its realistic logic in the philosophical word. Logic as a whole is purely oral and linguistic in character which expresses *Nyāya* concern about philosophy of language. *Nyāya* has developed its philosophy of language effectively on the ground of the presuppositions of realist metaphysics, Reality, according to them, can be known by means of linguistic analysis. The *Neo- Naiyāyikas* like Gangesa', for the sake of establishing clarity defined each name carefully by means of *avyāpti* (too narrow), *ativyāpti* (too wide), *Saṅkara* (cross) and *asambhava* (impossibility). This attempt of clarification, making free from ambiguity, is an important step in the philosophy of language.

The philosophical system in Indian tradition has to adopt linguistic analysis at least for the sake of establishing own philosophy. Each and every system has to refute opponent's views on order to establish their own views and this refutation is one of the fundamental features as found in the development of Indian philosophy. For this purpose, linguistic analysis becomes highly essential and *Vedānta* also has to adopt such analysis. The *Advaita- Vedāntins* by way of forwarding their own views and refuting others have taken recourse to the analysis of language. *Śaṅkara*, in the *Tarkapāda* chapter of the *Bhāṣya*, has successfully, refuted the views of *Sāṃkhya*, *Vaiśeṣika*, Buddhists etc. through the analysis of language. The phenomenon of *manana* which is

taken as one of the means of the self-realization reflects that it is the sacred duty of the *Advaitins* to critically judge and refute opponent's view in respect of doubt as to a particular meaning of a word. *Manana* is a kind of mental phenomenon which causes knowledge in the form of *Tarka* (Reductio-ad-absurdum) in the case of removing doubt as to a particular meaning of a word adopted by the opponents³. It becomes clear from this that *Advaita- Vedāntins* analyzed language of the opponents and thereby put their own standpoint in a linguistic form which makes their philosophical position compact and vivid.

The *Advaita- Vedāntins* used their analysis of language as a means to attain the knowledge of the *Brahman* or Absolute. They deal with both ordinary and philosophical language in their analysis. The criteria of meaningfulness of a sentence have been discussed by the *Advaitins*. They have emphasized on *ākāṁśā*, *yogyatā*, *āsatti* and *Tātparya* as criteria of determining the meaning of a sentence. They also discussed and analyzed ordinary linguistic form which have primary meaning (*sakyārtha*), secondary meaning (*lakṣyārtha*), meaning through intention (*tātparya*) etc. This tendency of analyzing ordinary language is highly essential in order to establish their philosophical conclusion. If *tātparya* is not taken as a criterion of meaning, the proper meaning of the statements like “*Tat tvam asi*” (Thou art Brahman) etc. would not be ascertained, as the essential identity between an individual self and the *Brahman* which is the proper meaning of the statement does not follow from the literal meaning. They analyzed each and every concept like the definitions and the term used in the *sutrās* in their philosophy of language. Even if linguistic analysis means the analysis of ordinary language as used by social beings, the *Vedāntins* do not hesitate for the same; rather they do it very carefully. *Śamkara* is found to analyze the ordinary language like ‘This is mine’ etc. which are commonly used by social beings. The aim of such analysis is to justify the philosophical position of such sentences. The acceptance of an implicative power behind a sentence by the *Vedāntins* finds justification in the face that it can explain both *Vedic* and secular sentences. This expresses that the *Vedāntins* give importance on the meaning of both *Vedic* and secular sentences.

But this analysis of language is not the ultimate goal; it might only help to attain the knowledge of the *Brahman*. The linguistic analysis done by the *Vedāntins* might help to go through the prescribed means like hearing (*Śravaṇa*), thinking (*Manana*), and meditating (*nididhyāsana*) for the realization of self⁴. These activities are not possible without being aware of the meaning attained through the analysis of knowledge. But according to the *Advaitins* all things except *Brahman* are false; *Brahman* is only real. It implies that when an individual is identified with *Brahman*, he loses his own identity and submerged in *Brahman*. At this stage all objects of the universe appear to him as manifestation of the *Brahman*. The objects are not vanished, but the awareness of their existence ceases for which all existence except *Brahman* becomes meaningless. This type of experience is purely subjective and therefore not communicable to others. When an individual attains this stage, he becomes seer (*Rṣi*) and there remains no room for linguistic analysis becomes contradicted. After self- realization the notion of duality ceases and leads to the falsity of language and linguistic analysis. So linguistic analysis is true only before attaining *Brahman* and it is the means to attain the ultimate goal i.e., self-realization. In western philosophy Bertrand Russell used linguistic analysis to arrive at metaphysical atoms like the *Advaitins*; but as a realist admits plurality of reals and does not refuse language at any stage.

The *Advaita-Vedāntins* start their journey with the analysis of language. But this analysis does not get priority as it is not the goal but only means. Hence the linguistic analysis of the *Vedāntins* is teleological. Analysis is done not for the sake of analysis but to facilitate others to realize *Brahma*. The other systems like *Nyāya*, *Mīmāṃsā* etc. also do linguistic analysis; but they do not describe it as illusory or *Māyā* just after attaining liberation. Language is useful as well as meaningful till *Brahman* or self-realization is not attained. The *Advaitins* admit implicative meaning (*Lakṣyārtha*) through implication (*Lakṣaṇā*) that follows from analysis of primary meaning. In a particular situation when some one utters the word 'door' (*Dvāram*), it implies saying either to close or to open the door. Here an implicative meaning is found from a single word. It is on the basis of *lakṣaṇā* that one word may mean something other than what is presented directly. They word constitute sentence under the conditions of *ākāṅkṣā*, *yogyotā*, *āsatti* and *tātparya*.

In view of *Vedānta*, the chance of ambiguity gives rise to *tātparya*. In order to understand *tātparya* of the sentence particularly used in *Vedānta* or *Śruti*, the context under which it is spoken or the intention of the speaker has to be taken into account. If *tātparya* in the sense of speaker's intention is not known, some statements may seem to be non-sensical. If the statement '*Tattvamasi*' is uttered by some one in the context of *Vedānta*, it means the essential identity between *Jīva* and *Brahman*. The same statement will not mean same if not uttered in this context. In case of the non-ambiguous sentence the inherent power (*śakti*) existing in word gives rise to meaning. When the direct meaning of a statement becomes inconsistent, the implicative or suggestive meaning is to be known. It is the context that determines whether the implicative or direct meaning is to be taken into account. The question of conveying meaning by either a standard form of a word or a dialectical form also refers to human factors. Thus, the context of the intention of the speaker is essential for the attainment of the meaning. In fact, implication would not at all be possible if there were no speaker's intention. The non-realizability of the speakers' intention is the root of implicative meaning.

The Problem of Meaning in Indian Philosophy:

The central problem in the philosophy of language is that of meaning. How to determine the meaning of word and sentences and what they mean are the basic questions in linguistic analysis. The objective of linguistic analysis in Indian tradition is to comprehend the meaning of Vedic sentences as well as the sentences of everyday life. The sentences are the units of language and they are constituted by words. Hence the meaning of words has occupied an important position together with meaning of sentences. The philosopher belonging to different schools put forward different explanations regarding the meaning of words and sentences. The grammarians again have different opinions and all these discussions and views with different in attitude enrich linguistic analysis in Indian philosophy.

Sāṃkhya, the oldest system of Indian philosophy also joins in the discussion of primary meaning of a word. Whether a word means an individual (*vyakti*) or universal (*jāti*) or a particular form (*ākṛti*) is the central issue in the discussion about the meaning of a word. The *Sāṃkhya* philosophers hold that a word denotes an individual (*vyakti*)⁵.

An individual is a composite material body which possesses specific properties. As the possessor of the qualities like colour, taste, smell, touch etc. it is a substance. The individual is manifested and open to sense perception. In other words, the individual is quantitatively determined matter and have a manifest body⁶. This view that word denotes individual becomes evident from the ordinary usage like 'that cow stands' etc. This statement refers to an individual cow not genus or universal. The reference to any individual object can be explained only with the view that words denote individuals.

But this view is not proper and sufficient to explain the meaning of a word. If a word denotes only the individual without universal then any word could mean any and every individual which is not justifiable. A word, in order to mean a particular individual, must somehow refer to a class or universal. The expression 'that cow stands' denotes only the 'cow' not any other like horse etc. Hence the property of being that object, e.g. being a cow or cowness must be implicitly there in the expression and this property or cowness is the universal. On this very ground the *Naiyāyikas* reject this view and hold that a word means not only the individual but also the generality of being that particular individual. According to them the words by themselves do not mean individuals alone; they mean individuals as possessing or belonging to universal. The words may refer to individuals as the individuals are associated with the primary meaning which is universal⁷.

According to the Jainas a word denotes the particular form or configuration of individual⁸. The *Mīmāṃsakas* and *Vedāntists* hold that a word means the class-character or genus of individuals. This genus is the basis or similar cognitions with regard to different individuals. Words primarily mean such universal as distinguished from the particulars of experience and at the same time capable of explaining the particulars by way of the knowledge of the genus. If a word means the individual then it must have as many meanings as there are individuals meant by it. This, however goes against the law of parsimony which requires that a word primarily mean universal and also refers to individuals; because universal and individual are inseparable in respect of both knowledge and existence. Whenever the universal is known the individuals are also known simultaneously. In other words, the universal and the individuals may be said to

be the primary and secondary meaning respectively. The word 'cow' means 'cowness' as well as the individual possessing the attribute of cowness.

The *Nyāya* philosophers hold that a word means the universal, the individual and the configuration at a time⁹. Mere universals are not the meaning of words since they can not be understood apart from individuals and their particular form. The same is the case with the individual and configuration. Hence the *Naiyāyikas* hold that these three together constitute the meaning of a word. It cannot be said that the word directly means the universal and indirectly the individual, for the word has only one primary meaning. All the three factors enter into the full meaning of a word which does not exclusively mean any of them. In the meaning of a word all these three factors, the individual, the form and the universal, are present in the same way though with different degree of prominence. Among the modern *Naiyāyikas*, two different views are found regarding the meaning of a word. Some modern *Naiyāyikas*, hold that a word means an individual as characterized by the universal,¹⁰ while others hold it means an individual as qualified by both the universal and the configuration¹¹. From this it may be concluded that the meaning of word has three aspects the pictorial, the denotative and the connotative. When uttered, a word calls up the form, denotes the individual and connotes the universal (genus).

The words constitute sentence (*vākya*). Like the problem of meaning of words, the meaning of sentence also becomes a philosophical issue. What the meaning of a sentence is, by which the meaning of sentence is determined, and what the relation between the words and the meaning of sentence is are the fundamental questions in this regard. As answer to such questions we find two different theories in Indian philosophy- *abhihitānvayavāda* and *anvitābhīdhānavāda*. According to the *abhihitānvayavāda*, the separate meanings of the constituent words determine the meaning of the sentence. This theory is advocated by the *Nyāya*, *Bhāttamīmāṃsā* and *Vedānta* system. The meaning of sentence, according to them, is merely the synthesis (*anvaya*) of the meaning of constituent words. After going through a sentence, the meaning of words is understood first one by one and then by putting them together according to *yogyatā*, *sannidhi*, *ākāṁśā* and *tātparya*, the meaning of the whole sentence is understood. The other view

i.e., *anvitābhīdhānavāda* holds that the meaning of a sentence is not merely the synthesis of the meaning of constituent words. A sentence possesses a unitary meaning of its own and it cannot be resolved to the complex meaning at its own. Every sentence means an action and words possess meaning only as they are related to that action. This action or verb is the central unit of a sentence and all other words develop the action. Hence in a sentence, there is first a construction of the words with one another and then an expression of the construed meaning of the whole sentence. There is, however, difference of opinion among the propounds of this theory. The *Prabhākara Mīmāṃsākas* and the grammarians. According to the grammarians the constituent words have no separate meanings of their own. On the contrary, the *Prabhākaras* hold that the constituent words perform two-fold functions. They convey both the separate meaning and the construed meaning of sentence. The meaning of sentence, according to the *Prabhākaras*, is neither an aggregate of nor quite independent of the separate meaning of words. The sentence is in fact, a new combination of the individual meaning of the words and conveys a new meaning. Supporting this S. C. Chatterjee says, “of the different views about the meaning of a sentence, that the *Prabhākaras* seems to be the best.”¹²

From the previous description the conclusion is proved that the relationship between words and meaning is brighter than word and meaning separately by its richness and loveliness in the ancient and modern Indian philosophy, literature, linguistics and the philosophy of language. The effects of Indian philosophy of language spread mastery in the literature of Sanskrit philosophy and it's brighter philosophic part is exhibited by 'Elements of Linguistics in the Indian Philosophy'. In the first instance, such the economy is received as a part of linguistic yet the relationship between word and meaning is needed to receive constant, not inconstant. The relationship between linguistic and philosophy is very close for which the tradition of the language is existent now a days.

References

1. *Vedā*- knowledge texts which are considered the sources of Hindu religion, Basically, the number of *Vedās* are four-*Rg. Vedā, Yajurvedā Sāmvedā* and *Atharvavedā*.

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2. *āgama*- Source text of Indian culture and thought technically texts related to Tantra, also a valid means of knowledge.
3. *Vedānta-Paribhāṣā*, p. 213 (Swami Madhavananda edition).
4. *Vedānta-Paribhāṣā*, p. 212 (Swami Madhavananda edition).
5. *Nyāybhāṣya*, 2.2.57.; *Vivaraṇaprameyasamgraha*, p. 181.
6. *Nyāya Sūtra*, 2.2.64.
7. *Nyāybhāṣya*, 2.2.58-59.
8. *Vivaraṇaprameyasamgraha*, p. 181.
9. *Nyāya Sūtra* and *Nyāybhāṣya*, p. 62-63.
10. *Siddhāntamuktāvalī*, p. 81.
11. *Śabdaśaktiprakāśikā*, p. 19.
12. S. C. Chatterjee; *Nyaya Theory of Knowledge*, p. 343.