# THREE TRENDS OF PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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*Abstract: It is the language we communicate and exchange our views. All types of cognition come through the use of language. Problems are related to whether a word refers to something existing in the external world (vastvartha) or something existing in our intellect (budhhyartha). The Indian philosophers are divided into two camps- on one side, there are Naiyāyikas and Vaiśeṣikas, while on the other, there are Buddhists and Grammarians. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system deals with the meaning referring to a real object existing in the external world. To them, the meaning of a word is the referent (padārtha). However, Buddhists and grammarians think that the meaning of a word remains in the intellect (bauddha) of an individual but not in the real entity. They have made a clear distinction between existence in the real world and existence in the intellectual world. Such difference of opinion depends on different metaphysical presuppositions of different systems. To the Buddhist's mental ascriptions cannot reveal the true nature of an object. For Grammarians, each and every well-formed word yield meaning, while Nyāya cannot go beyond their world of padārthas.*

Whether language can express all thoughts a human being possesses is very difficult to solve. A large number of scholars have discussed at length the problem in question, but no final conclusion can be drawn in this respect. Before entering into the main problem, it is to be decided whether language means alphabetical language or non-alphabetical, or both. In this paper, an effort will be made to discuss the concept of language, and ultimately it is to be decided whether thought-in-general is capable of being expressed through language.

It is the language through which we communicate and exchange our views. All types of cognition come through the use of language. Cognition, which does not come via language, is an impossible phenomenon. Even the cognition of an absurd entity like a barren woman's son (*bandhyāputra*), hare's horn (*śaśaśṛnga*), sky-flower (*ākāśakusuma*), etc., is attained through the usage of language. It is the language through which a man can establish a close relationship with another man. In the same way, language can create distance from one another. All types of understanding, misunderstanding, ambiguity, etc., are also language-centric. That is why in the *Ṛgveda* and *Upaniṣad*, the *Vāk* is highly eulogized.

Moreover, language is always flexible and growing because it is normally created to express a particular thought. In other words, a peculiar language is created to accommodate certain thoughts. Sometimes, many Indian terms have been anglicized, e.g., "The students have *gheraoed* the Vice-chancellor," "The police have made a

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mild *lāthi*-charge," etc. In these cases, the terms' *gheraoed'* is formed through the verbification of the non-English term "*gherao,*" and in this same way, the term "*lāṭhi*-charge" is formed with the English term "charge" with a Bengali word – "*lāṭhi.*" These have become meaningful words, though they are formed bilingually. In the same way, many Dravidian and Arabian words have entered the world of Sanskrit. Hence it can be said that a word is not fixed but flexible. It is changed often seeing the usage of a particular sect or a section of people. As it is extendable or flexible, it can express many things. So, if any distortion is needed for this, it is permissible in our society, as endorsed even by Pāṇini. In Pāṇinian grammar, a formation of a particular word is justified after citing its usage, particularly found in the East or the North, by mentioning the terms – "*iti prācām*" or "*iti udīcām,*" etc. Though a single syllable is very much costly in a *sūtra*, Pāṇini has made no hesitation to incorporate these words in the *sutra* in order to give prominence to the usages of the social beings (*loka-vyavahāra*) in the formation of language. Some of the verbs of having *dvitva* (dual usage) of a phoneme or word like '*katham tvam paṭṭpaṭākaroṣi'* (why are you doing *patpat* i.e., making sound *patpat*?) "*Sapharī pharpharāyate*" (i.e., a small fish is making a sound as *pharphar*), etc., are formed after considering their usages in our life. Some sounds that are called technically *plutasvaras* are accommodated in the Paninian system considering the same *lokavyavahāra*. If someone calls someone from a distance, sings a song, or laments, these sounds are called *plutas* (*durāhvāne gāne rodane ca plutah matah*). ( Das. 1967)  In fact, we get a different set of language, which is used at the time of calling others from a distance or singing a song, or lamenting with words. This language of specific nature has a successful entry into the realm of grammar because it is also used by the public (*lokavyavahāra*). Sometimes in the Vedas, the seers have used a language different from the classical one. Sometimes the language is apparently faulty in the eye of classical language. In order to justify this special grammar, special rules are formulated. In this way, the language grows, and it can be developed to any extent to incorporate all usages found in different times and spaces. Hence language cannot remain away from thought existing in the real world.

Though the standpoint mentioned above is true, an entity referred to by a word exists in the external world or intellectual world. In other words, all problems are related to whether a word refers to something existing in the external world (*vastvartha*) or something existing in our intellect *(budhhyartha)*. The former is also thought, which has a corresponding fact to the real world, while in the latter case, there is some thought which may be the product of our intellect that has nothing to do with the world of reality. Indian philosophers are divided into two camps- on one side, there are Naiyāyikas and Vaiśeṣikas, while on the other, there are Buddhists and Grammarians. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system deals with the meaning referring to a real object existing in the external world. To them, the meaning of a word is the referent which is either in the form of substance (*dravya*), quality (*guṇa),* action *(karma)*, universal (*sāmānya*), particularity (*viśeṣa)*, etc. No entity exists outside the purview of

these categories *(padārthas)*.[1] A particular word gives rise to a particular meaning, and hence there is arbitrariness in the world of meaning. This word-meaning relationship is known through the potency *(sanketa)* or power *(śakti)* of a term. A word endowed with suffixes is technically called *pada*. Sometimes the analysis of the derivation of a word gives rise to its meaning according to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika. The meaning available through the potency of a word is called its *artha*.

However, Buddhists and grammarians think that the meaning of a word remains in the intellect *(bauddha)* of an individual, but not the real entity. In this connection, Pataňjali has made an interesting remark-"*na sattaṁ padārtho vyabhicaratiz"* [2] (i.e., the meaning of a word is always existent or being). This existence is not to be taken as existence *in the world of reality but the world of intellect*. They have made a clear distinction between existence in the real world and existence in the intellectual world. The Grammarians believe that the entities like hare's horn *(śaśaśṛnga)* etc., though having no *outer* existence, have got *ideational* existence. Pāṇini technically calls something remaining in the world of intellect "imposed existence" *(aupacārikī sattā)*. The term "*upacāra*" means "imposition" *(āropa)*. The existence that does not exist in the real world is taken to exist in the world of intellect, and hence it is called having *aupacārikī sattā* or imposed existence. According to Pāṇini, the domain of intellectual existence is larger than that of the real one. To him, no word directly refers to an object. The words like 'jar' etc., which are taken to be meaningful, and "hare's horn" etc. which are taken to be meaningless, have got primary meaning in the domain of one's intellect. There is no distinction between a word having meaning and one that has no meaning at all. To them, all the words and sentences are *significant*, leaving no room for insignificant words. The grammarians have substantiated the ideational meaning with the help of various arguments and also refuted the notion of semantic compatibility *(yogyatā)* as endorsed by the Naiyāyikas. If it is admitted that the verbal apprehension is ideational in general, there is no scope for semantic incompatibility. The ideational meaning is described as 'endowed with existence as well as non-existence *(bhavābhāva-sādhāraṛa')*.[3] The existent and non-existent entities appear in our intellect without considering their real status. The external object "fire" or "sprinkling" is not the meaning of a word but a holistic sentence that appears in the land of our intellect, which may not have any correspondence to a real entity, leading to non-impediment to the ascertainment of sentence meaning.

While discussing the status of language in identifying reality, the grammarians have emphasized the role of the speaker's intention *(tātparya)* in grasping the meaning of the sentence uttered. To Nāgeśa, a celebrated grammarian believes that if

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[1] Kaṇāda: *Vaiśeṣika-sūtra* with Upaskāra, 1/1/4, Chowkhamba, Varanasi, 1969. also Annambhatta: *Tarka-samgraha-dīpikā*, Chowkhamba, Varanasi, 1969, p.98.
[2] Pataňjali: *Mahābhāṣya*, with Pradīpa and Udyota, vol-II, p.581. *Aṣṭādhyāyī* with Mahābhāṣya (with commentaries), Motilal Banarasi Das, Delhi, Vol.II, 1967.
[3] Nāgeśa: *Marma-prakāśah* on *Rasagangādhara*, by Panduranga Jaoyaji quoted in Raghunath Ghosh & Bhaswati Bhattacharya (Ed): *Śabdārtha-Vicāra*, Article of Nandita Bandyopadhyaya, Allied, Kolkata, 2005, pp.20-32.

there is intention proper, all words can denote all senses ("*sati tātparye sarve sarvārtha-vācakāh*"). (Goswami & Ganguly. 1990. 62) From this, it is to be presumed that all words can denote all senses without taking the help of *lakşaṇā* (implicative meaning) if and only if the there is a sweet will *(vivakşā)* of the speaker. The denotation of a word can involve all objects if intended by an individual being. For this reason, the grammarians have given much emphasis on *vivakşā* (i.e., sweet will of the speaker) in determining the relation between word and meaning, which has been admitted by Bhartṛhari also. To him, the meanings are always regulated by the words "*artha-pravṛtti-tattvānām śabda eva nibandhanam*"). (Bhattacharya, 1985) The meaning is interpreted as per the speaker's intention, as mentioned by some of the thinkers "*arthasya pravṛtti-tattvam vivakşā*") . (Ibid.)· The speaker's intention is the prime factor in determining the word-meaning relationship. To the grammarians, the meaning does not necessarily mean referring to something really existing in the external world *("na tu svarūpatayā sattvamasattvam vā"*) . (Ibid.). A word may refer to something though the object does not exist in the external world. The matter can be substantiated by quoting the following verse: "*Eşo bandhyāsūto yāti kha-puşpa-kṛta-śekharah/ kurma-kşīra-caye snātah śaśaśṛṅgadhanurdharah//.*" It means that a barren woman's son goes wearing a crown of sky flowers; he has taken a bath in the tortoise milk and carries a bow made from a rabbit's horn. In this *śloka*, the following words are barren woman's son (*bandhyāputra),* "sky-flower" *(khapuşpa)*, "tortoise-milk" (*kurma-kşīra)*, and 'rabbit's horn' (*śaśaśṛṅga)* have no corresponding entities existent in this world. Though it is true, this does not prove that the words have no senses at all. To Bhartṛhari, an ideational character of meaning which has no reference to the external world has to be taken as the real meaning of a word. Although these things do not exist in the external world, they are not to be taken as nonsensical in the true sense of the term. The words like rabbit's horn etc., though not having any corresponding reality, make sense which is called metaphorically imposed existence (*aupacārikī sattā*) (Helārajā. 1963) This intellectual meaning *(bauddha artha)* is the pure meaning, though there is no corresponding image.

Such ideational meaning has been admitted in the Yoga philosophy as the concept of *vikalpa.* To them, *vikalpa* is nothing but sense appearing in our intellect from a certain word having no corresponding real entity ("*śabda-jñānānupāti vastu-śūnyo vikalpah*"). (Vedantachanchu. 1970)  The grammarians also admit their concept of prātipadikārtha evidence this ideational meaning. The grammarians think that the first case ending applies to the *prātipadikārtha*.(Das. 1967) It is nothing but a sense appearing in our intellect as soon as a *prātipadika* is uttered. A *prātipadika* is a peculiar entity with a meaning, not a verbal root or a suffix ("*athavad-adhāturapratyayah*"). (Das.1967) In the sentence-"*śaśaśṛṅgam nāsti*" (there is no rabbit's horn), the word "*śaśaśṛṅga*" (rabbit's horn) is conjoined with the first case-ending because it is *prātipadika* conveying an ideational meaning. Had no ideational meaning been admitted in the *prātipadika,* the term *śaśaśṛṅga* would not have been taken as a *prātipadika* leading to its non-usage in language. However, actually, we find its usage in a sentence, which proves that it is a kind of *prātipadika* having an intellectual meaning.(Goswami. 2002, 71-76)

To Nyāya, the language is the bearer of reality, which is of seven types-substance *(dravya),* quality *(guṇa),* action *(karma),* etc. Language is invented to express such reality or *padārthas.* It cannot be used to express something having any reality at all (i.e., an absurd entity). Each and every word must have a referent, which is metaphorically described as *ekaikaśarānuviddha.* Just an arrow is thrown aiming at a particular object existing in the external world; each and every word is used to express a particular real entity. A language cannot express something absurd or unreal. In fact, the expression of unreality is contradictory in terms, as expressibility *(vācyatva)* presupposes its knowability *(jñeyatva).* On account of this, the Naiyāyikas have not accepted even the absence of an absurd entity. To them, the expressions like "*ākāśakusumam nāsti*" (sky-flower does not exist), "*bandhyāputro nāsti*" (barren's son does not exist), etc. are not considered absent in the true sense of the term, because the absentee *(pratiyogī)* whose absence is asserted here does not exist in the real world. The knowledge of absence presupposes its absentee *(pratiyogijñānasāpekṣam abhāvajñānam)*. Hence, the absence of an entity could be talked about if and only if its absentee belongs to the world of reality *(prasaktasyaiva pratiṣedhah).*

If it is said following the line of Frege that the terms "sky-flower," "*bandhyāputra,*"etc., have got sense but no reference, it will not be acceptable to Nyāya. Because if they are taken as having sense, they would have been taken as *vācya* or expressible entities, which means that they will have knowability *(jñeyatva).* As the knowability of such expressions is not there, they do not have any sense. If it is argued that the entities belonging to the world of reality have got senses, it may be well taken by the Naiyāyikas as a desirable one *(iṣṭāpatti).* The fact that an entity belonging to the real world has got sense proves that it has got referent.

A problem may be raised in this connection. Can the verbal usage of something, which stands for some unknowable entity, be justified as meaningful through implication or *lakṣaṇā*? In other words, indeed, the expressions like *ākāśakusuma,* etc., cannot give rise to primary meaning. Can they provide any meaning through implication? In reply, it can be said that the seed of *lakṣaṇā* (implicative meaning) lies in the non-realisability of the intention of the speaker *(tātparyānupapatti).* The expression-"The milk-man-colony is on the Ganges" *(gangāyām ghoṣah)* bears implicative meaning, as the speaker's intention is not realizable to us. A sensible speaker cannot say that a colony remains on water flow. For the sake of the realizability of the speaker's intention, the implicative meaning of the expression "The milk-man-colony on the bank of the Ganges" *(Gangātîre ghoṣah)* is to be taken into account. It is to be borne in mind that implication is always connected with the primary meaning *(śakyasambandhā lakṣaṇā)*. If there is an incompatibility in the primary meaning due to the non-realisability of the speaker's intention, an individual is allowed to search for its implicative meaning. To have this secondary meaning, understanding the primary meaning is a precondition. Otherwise, how is the non-realisability of the speaker's intention known? In the case of the statements about an absurd entity like *"ākāśakusumam Surabhi"* (sky-flower is fragrant) etc., fail to provide the primary meaning due to the absurd character of the subject, leading to the impossibility of the secondary meaning. Moreover, the contradiction in the primary

meaning *(mukhyārthabadha)* is the precondition to assuming the secondary meaning. In the case mentioned above, there is no realization of any contradiction at the semantic level because the absurd entities fail to provide direct meaning. However, in the case of *Gangāyām ghoṣah,* etc., there is no problem with understanding the primary meaning and the non-realisability of the speaker's intention. In order to get rid of this situation, the only way out is to admit the implicative meaning of the same. From the above discussion, it is followed that in Nyāya's philosophical framework, there is no room for sense without reference.

The Nyāya account of the theory of meaning reveals that it does not strictly distinguish between sense and reference. The thought expressed by language may be in the form of sense or reference conceived by some thinkers, but for Nyāya, the term "*artha"* stands for referent only. If a word has no referent, it will be taken as non-sensical. To them, there is a relation called *vṛtti* between an expression and what is referred to by it. The referent is meaning or *artha,* which is of two types- primary and secondary. The directly pointed meaning or referent is called the primary one. For example, the referent of the term "*Gangā"* is a particular flow of our water enclosed by a canal brought by Bhagîratha *(Bhagīrathakhātāvacchinna-jalapravaha-viśeṣā).* When this direct referent is not conceivable, an indirect referent is assigned to a particular expression, called a secondary referent or implicative referent. For example, the expression-*"Gangāyām ghoṣah"* (The milk-man-colony is on the Ganges) gives rise to secondary meaning or referent of the term-'*Gangā*' as *"Gangātîra"* (the bank of the Ganges) due to having some incompatibility in taking the primary meaning, i.e., the flow of water. A milkman's colony cannot remain on it, and hence there is a shift in the referent to accommodate certain thoughts.

In Buddhism, the nature of an object is of two types: *svalakṣaṇa* (unique particular) and *sāmānyalakṣaṇa* (something bearing general character). The momentary former is revealed by perception alone, while the latter is through concepts (*dhāraṇā*) of which language is one. In other words, an object, non-erroneous and free from mental ascriptions (*kalpanā*), is revealed through perception. ("*kalpanāpodham abhrāntam pratyakṣam" – Nyāyabindu* – 3). When the same object is known in the light of the mental ascriptions (*kalpanā*) like name, universal, and other linguistic usages, it is no more a unique particular due to the loss of its momentary character. In fact, the object on which these ascriptions are imposed is not present there due to the effect of its momentary nature. That is why; the Buddhists argue that the real nature of an object is known through perception, which is the ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya)*. When the object is known through language or mental ascription, it is not the same object seen earlier. The object seen and described is not the same due to its transitoriness. However, these concepts can provide us some idea about the object, and hence it comes under second-order reality because the object's true nature is veiled by language. For this reason, it is called *samvṛtisatya* ('veiled reality'), which receives second order status in Buddhist epistemology. The second-order reality known through mental ascriptions comes under inference due to its apprehension through the general character of the object (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*) as opposed to the "unique character" (*svalakṣaṇa*) of the same.

From the above epistemological background, the Buddhists have concluded that mental ascriptions cannot reveal the true nature of an object. In other words, language cannot provide us with the real picture of an object; rather, it sometimes misleads. To them, the "real object" (*sad vastu*) has got causal efficacy (*artha-kriyā-kāritva*) which is the mark of existence as per the definitions "*yat sat tat kṣaṇikam*" (whatever is momentary is existent) and "*arthakriyākāritva-lakṣaṇam sat*" (the object accomplishing causal efficacy is to be taken as existent). In our day-to-day life, we deal with the objects that can serve our purpose (*artha-kriyā-kārī).* For example, we can take the case of "fire" or "water" as an existent object because, in reality, the "fire" or "water" can fulfill our needs of cooking or drinking, etc. The Buddhists have distinguished between a real fire and "fire." If we want to cook, we need fire in reality, but not the word "fire." It is the object 'fire', which can fulfill our needs even without knowing its name. If somebody shouts the word "fire" a thousand times, it cannot fulfill our need for cooking. That is why; the word can provide us the picture of fire, which receives a second order status due to its lack of causal efficacy (*artha-kriyā-kāritva*).

Considering this in view, the Buddhists have argued that language is always misleading, as it cannot grasp the real object. For example, they have quoted the words *dārāh* ('wives'), *ṣannagarī* ('six cities'), etc. Those who use the word *dārāh* with plural suffix mean only "one wife." In the same way, *ṣannagarī* is the name of a city, but literally, it means "collection of six cities." In this way, the Buddhists have shown that language is very much futile to refer to the real nature of an object.

Though the language cannot provide us the taste of first order reality, it is essential for philosophical discourse or debate. For the sake of philosophizing and defending one's own position the language has to be resorted to. Because, this is not his personal cognition but he has to convince others about his achievement. It is possible only through language though it yields us a distorted or veiled (*samvṛta*) reality.

In fact, the word application or concept application is an essential part of our mental activity. Language is correctly described by Dharmakīrti etc., as *vikalpa* ('substitute') or *kalpanā* ('imagination'), i.e., the conceptual or imaginative construction. It identifies the perceived object which is not present at the time of description. Language identifies the representation of the object in perception. Words or concepts do this specific function. The concept's function is to exclude the other imagined or supposed possibilities. The rejection of the contrary concepts is achieved through the application of the concepts. In the like manner, one can know the unfailing character of the cognition or uncontradicted cognition within a moment with the help of one's matured perception – without depending on its causal efficacy (*na tu arthakriyāprāptyā*).[4]

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[4] *"Nanvidam prāpaṇayogyamidam netyarthakriyāprāptimantareṇa niścetumaśakyam. Jñānotpattimātreṇa tu na bhrāntābhrāntayorbhedo'vadhāryate. Tataśca katham tat samyagjñānamiti cet. Naiṣa doṣaḥ. Yadyapi jñānamātrodayādvaiśiṣṭyamanayoravadhārayitum na śakyate. Tathāpi jñānaviśeṣodayādyathaikasya vaiśiṣṭyam tathocyate. Tathā hi- yadi nāma mandabuddhirutpattivaśādavisamvādakatvam jñānsya nāvadhārayitum samarthaḥ tathāpi*

From the above discussion, we may conclude that one trend in the philosophy of language is found among the Naiyāyikas, who hold the view that each and every word must have some referent, but not only the sense as found in the concepts of *padārtha* (literally meaning of the word). The meaning is confined within their world of *padārtha*-s; there is nothing beyond this world. The second trend is found among the grammarians who believe that a word may not have a referent, yet it can be taken as a meaningful word. To them, meaning is of two types: referential (*vastvartha*) and ideational (*bauddha artha*). For them, a word may not have a referent, yet it may be meaningful because it can give us some understanding on the intellectual level. Moreover, nothing in this world is not revealed through language. The third trend is found among the Buddhists who believe that any mental expression, including language, cannot reveal the ultimate reality (*paramārtha satya*). However, the covered reality called *samvṛti satya* can be revealed through it. Hence language cannot reveal the true nature of an object or reality at all.

## Conclusion

Diversity of opinion among the three systems- Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Grammarians, and Buddhists lies in the ontological presuppositions admitted by them. Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school admits referent (*padārtha*) as denoted by a word. The object which exists ideationally is not a real referent of the term. The Grammarians believe that a well-formed word always refers to an entity that may really exist or non-exist in the external world. Lastly, the Buddhists think that language falls under mental ascription (*kalpanā*), and hence it cannot reveal the empirical object, i.e., *svalakṣaṇa*.

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*dāhapākāvagāhanasnānapānonmajjanādyarthakriyām      dūrato'nubhavato      narasya darśanenoccaladdhūmādidarśanena           cāvadhārayati.      Amandabuddhistu paṭutarapratyakṣenaivāvadhārayati,   na   tvarthakriyāpraptyā.".Bauddhatarkabhāṣā   of Mokṣākaragupta, Edited by Dr. Raghunath Giri, Prachya Prakashan, Varanasi, 1969, pp.4-5.*

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