

## LANGUAGE AND WORLD : SOME CLASSICAL INDIAN APPROACHES VIS-A-VIS ANALYTICAL WESTERN APPROACHES

### Prologue

In this paper I am going to deal with some classical Indian approaches to language and the world, to their nature and relationship. I have particularly selected those approaches which, I thought, are most relevant to some of the approaches that were presented or discussed in analytical philosophy of the west. Behind this exercise I have a special purpose in my mind. Analytical movement in the west marks an important turning point in the history of western philosophy. It opens up new ways of justifying science as against religion and metaphysics, common sense as against scepticism and justification of ordinary language and of special technical languages as the vehicle of philosophising as against each other. It would be rather ambitious to claim that classical Indian philosophy marks any such movement. But if analytical movement in the west happens to be important for the students of Indian philosophy, it cannot be studied and developed by them without relativising it in any way to Indian philosophical tradition. For doing this we need not equate modern western with the classical Indian tradition. But it should be possible to point out, in howsoever sketchy manner, the ways in which the two traditions come close to each other and those in which they fall apart. Such an exercise could also help us in developing analytical studies which have their roots in classical Indian philosophy.

In what follows I will sketch out four broad approaches to language and the world as I found them in the four philosophical systems viz., *Vaiśeṣika*, Buddhist, Jaina and Cārvāka. Side by side, I will indicate some comparable aspects of western analytical movement.

(1) *Coextensiveness of the real, the knowable and the nameable : The Vaiśeṣika approach*

Prāsaṣtapāda, the Vaiśeṣika commentator, said that the characteristics common to all the six *padārthas* are realness (or being, *astītva*), knowability (*prameyatva*) and nameability (or expressibility in language, *abhidheyatva*). When later on absence (*abhāva*) was added to the original list of *padārthas*, the same common characteristics were ascribed to absence too. Vaiśeṣikas held that whatever is expressible in language is knowable and *vice-versa*. Similarly, whatever is knowable is real and *vice versa*. This view of language, knowledge and reality seems to have led Vaiśeṣikas to present a 'crowded' picture of the universe. Their universe contains Time, Space and Selves as ubiquitous substances, the numbers, the relative qualities like proximity and remoteness etc. as objective qualities and universals, peculiarities (*Viśeṣa*), the internal relations like *samavāya* and what more, absences too as the entities in this universe. Behind this, it seems, Vaiśeṣikas are having a picture theory of language according to which corresponding to every meaningful expression in our language there must be something real in the world. But this 'picture theory' is much more crude and unsophisticated than that of Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*. Because Vaiśeṣikas do not seem to think, as Wittgenstein does, that the surface structure of our language often misleads us as to the structure of the world expressed through it<sup>1</sup>. They do not try to isolate some working sentences from language as non-sensical or senseless<sup>2</sup>, and restrict the view of significant sentences to the remaining sentences as Wittgenstein does. Similarly, Vaiśeṣikas seem to understand linguistic knowledge of the reality as almost the mirror-impression of pre-linguistic knowledge. Therefore, there is almost one-to-one correspondence between objects perceived in non-judgemental perception and those in judgemental perception and similarly between the steps in *Svārthānumāna* and those in *Parārthānumāna* according to them.

It is true that from Gaṅgeśa onwards there is found a growing tendency of dissatisfaction amongst Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thinkers, with ordinary language as the vehicle of philosophising. But it was not because ordinary language was found to be distorting the true nature of reality but because it was found to be full of vagueness and ambiguities. In any case, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika attitude of dissatisfaction with ordinary languages led them to develop many tools and devices of clarifying

any given statement or definition and making it more and more precise. This resulted in devising a special technical language as the proper language of philosophical inquiry. This approach of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thinkers may be compared with Bertrand Russell's attempt to devise an ideal language to describe the world precisely and clearly. But the structural differences between their proposed technical languages should not be underestimated which are partly due to the radical differences between their world-views.

The Vaiśeṣika view of language and the world seems to come very close to that of Alexius Meinong. Meinong's world contains every object that one can know or talk about. Similar is the world of Vaiśeṣikas, the only major difference being that the non-entities like golden mountain, square circle, horn of a hare or the son of a barren woman have no place in the Vaiśeṣikas' world of *padārthas* which they have in Meinong's world of objects. For Meinong the statement "The horn of a hare does not exist" will be about the horn of a hare. And hence the horn of a hare for him must be subsistent, though not existent. For Vaiśeṣikas, however, such a statement is not about horn of a hare but it is better understood as the one about hares, predicating the absolute absence of horns to them. In this respect the world of Vaiśeṣikas is less populated than that of Meinong. But it is certainly more populated than that of Cārvākas and Buddhists in India or Wittgenstein, Russell and Logical positivists in the West. Curiously enough the credit of developing the technique of *lāghava* and *gaurava*, which closely resembles that of Okham's razor, in India, goes to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thinkers themselves. But they seem to have used this technique more in order to criticise over-population in the ontologies of their opponents than to reduce the population of their own ontology.

One more point of similarity between the world of Vaiśeṣikas and that of Meinong may be noted here. Meinong had to accept different degrees of realness in order to avoid inconsistency and disorder in his overpopulated world of objects. Hence, for Meinong horses exist but the being of horses subsists; similarly, non-being of the non-existent entities subsists, does not exist.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, for Vaiśeṣikas substances, qualities and motions exist in the sense that they are the proper substrata of Existence (*sattā*) which is a *jāti*. But the Existence, i.e. *sattā-jāti*, though real, does not 'exist' in this technical sense

of 'existence'. Similarly, *jātis* other than *sattā*, *viśeṣas*, *samavāya* and *abhāva* too are real, but they do not exist.

We considered above the Vaiśeṣika approach to language and the world. In the next two sections we will deal with two rival approaches viz. those of Buddhists and Jains.

(2) *Language consists of universals. But universals are not there in reality : the Buddhist approach*

Buddhism consists of many schools of thought, with some common perspective of individual and social life but with varied but mutually overlapping understandings of ontology and the way we come to know it. Here I am mainly concerned with the view of Dīnāga and Dharmakīrti, the famous Buddhist logicians. The approach of these logicians to language and world differs radically from that of Vaiśeṣikas. These logicians would not accept co-extensiveness of the real, the knowable and the nameable as Vaiśeṣikas do.

According to Dharmakīrti, for instance, *svalakṣaṇas*, i.e., the basic particulars are real (*sat*) in the true sense of the term (*paramārthataḥ*). These basic particulars are given to us here and now, in an immediate direct consciousness i.e. in *nimikāpaka pratyakṣa*.<sup>4</sup> But when we judge these objects to be so-and-so, our cognition gets mixed up with mental constructs or linguistic constructs which are of universal character<sup>5</sup> (*sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*). What we are given in the knowledge that we acquire through language or inference are universals. Thus, both particulars and universals are objects of knowledge. But out of them only particulars are real. Universals are objects of language and of inference<sup>6</sup>, but they are not real. They are mental constructs (*kalpita*). They do not 'refer' to anything that is there but relate to it by excluding from it what it is not (*anyavyāvṛtti*). *Apoḥavāda* of these Buddhist logicians refers to this function of language involving a sort of negative ontological commitment<sup>7</sup>.

This Buddhist approach to language and world indicates that the Buddhist world is not as populated or burdened with 'entities' as that of Vaiśeṣikas. The eternal substances including Self, Time, Space and internal Sense Organ, the qualities apart from sensible qualities, universals, peculiarities of eternal substances, Inherence and

absences which have a respectable place in the world of Vaiśeṣikas have no place in this Buddhist world. Buddhist logicians seem to have applied Ockham's razor much more rigorously than Vaiśeṣikas.

This brings us to a point of comparison between Buddhist logicians and western analytical thinkers like Russell and Early Wittgenstein. The Buddhist view may be presented in terms of logical grammar by saying that for Buddhist logicians all expressions in our language behave like common nouns. There are no logically proper names in our language. This is perhaps a case of nominalism stricter than that of Russell who thought that 'this' is a logically proper name or early Wittgenstein who talked of names that stand for objects in the world. Within Indian tradition it sharply distinguishes itself from the Nyāya view that every word has as its meaning the particular object, the form thereof and the universal of which it is an instance (*vyaktyākṛtijāyastu padārthaḥ*)<sup>8</sup>. It also distinguishes itself from Pūrva-mīmāṃsā and Vyākaraṇa views according to which a non-transitory character was attributed to words and other linguistic units and also to meanings thereof. We need not discuss the details of the matter here. The interesting point, however, seems to be that just as the nominalism of Russell and Wittgenstein was a rejoinder to the traditional western forms of Platonism and realism with regard to meaning and universals, the nominalism of Buddhist logicians in India was a rejoinder to the quasi-platonistic and realistic theories of meanings and universals found in the systems like Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā and Vyākaraṇa.

Let us now discuss in brief another antithesis of the Nyāya-approach to language and world, viz. the Jaina approach.

- (3). *Our language has some basic limitations. It cannot depict the world clearly and exactly : The jaina approach*

The world as Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thinkers conceived it and the one as Jainas conceived it may be different from each other in many points of details. But the two worlds are also similar in an important respect. Both are complex wholes crowded with entities. All the 'entities' which constitute these worlds are not ontologically real, but many of them are in fact impositions or projections of language. They are full of substances and their characteristics, some of them being permanent and others transitory. The world of Jainas is in a sense far more

crowded than that of Vaiśeṣikas, because everything in it is possessed with innumerable qualities (*anantadharmatmaka*) some of them being even apparently contradictory. The apparently contradictory characteristics projected upon things by Jains seem to be following complete non-violence and hence staying together without harming each other. Jains give an impression that even the law of noncontradiction is relaxed in their world and this relaxation seems to result into the thesis of infinitely over-populated universe (because anything and everything follows from a contradiction !) But this is not my main point for discussion here.

The point that I want to make here is rather this. Although the worlds of both, Vaiśeṣikas and Jains, are more or less equally overcrowded, their responses to the question whether we can grasp its true nature through knowledge and language, move in opposite directions. (Both the systems believe in the existence of an Omniscient being, whether divine or human. But here the main question is about the knowledge and language that ordinary men have an access to). Nyāya Vaiśeṣika thinkers seem to suggest that the true nature of reality can be encompassed within the frame of our knowledge and language. Navya-Naiyāyikas use various techniques like *avacchedakatā* and *pratiyogū* in order to define terms and describe the reality clearly and exactly. Jains, on the contrary, seem to suggest in their doctrine of *syādvāda*, that our language has some basic limitations so that any description of any reality is bound to be incomplete, vague and would be acceptable only in a limited frame of reference, under a certain interpretation. We can say : 'In a way (*syāt*) pot exists, in a way it doesn't. This technique of *syāt* helps Jains to point out the limits of ordinary language but does not suggest any way to overcome them.

We use indicative sentences for describing reality in a variety of logico-linguistic forms and with a variety of meanings. The variety of ways in which such sentences are used and the different logico-linguistic forms that they assume are discussed and classified by Jains in their another doctrine called *nayavāda*. The nature of language that Jains present before us through their doctrines of *syādvāda* and *nayavāda* is not rigid, but elastic and flexible, not closed but open. The meanings of expressions according to

this view are not fixed and absolute but flexible and relative to certain contexts or frames of reference. This flexible and relative character of our language though useful for expressing a variety of view-points concerning reality, indicates some serious limitations to the power of language to draw accurate and absolutely true pictures of reality. These limits seem to Jainas to be an essential feature of language. That is why transgressing these limits amounts to committing a fallacy called *nayābhāsa* according to them. Philosophers, more than common men, are accustomed to transgress the limits of language and to advance absolute claims about Reality. It is no wonder, therefore, that the examples of *nayābhāsa* that Jainas give are nothing but rival philosophical positions. Through the doctrine of *nayabhasa* Jainas suggest that many absolute philosophical positions are the results of transgressing the limits of language<sup>9</sup>.

The Jaina approach to language that becomes manifest through their doctrines of *syat*, *naya* and *nayābhāsa* is comparable with that of later Wittgenstein and Gilbert Ryle. Comparably with the former, Jainas seem to be suggesting that seemingly contradictory expressions become meaningful and acceptable if they correspond to different forms of life. They are suggesting that we would be confused and mistaken in our approach if we seek for descriptions meaningful and true independently of any form of life. Comparably with the latter, Jainas seem to be suggesting that men in their ordinary discourse employ certain expressions that mislead philosophers who are in search of 'real' meanings of these expressions. These expressions, according to Ryle "are perfectly clearly understood by those who use them". But they systematically mislead philosophers because they are "couched in grammatical or syntactical forms which are in a demonstrable way improper to the states of affairs which they record".

Here Jainas would say that the syntactical or what may be called apparent logico-linguistic forms represent *nayas*, i.e. modes of expression. They throw some light on the structure of the reality when the sentences having those forms are used for describing it. But they do it partially and vaguely. *Nayas* do not give a complete and clear picture of reality. Philosophers, however, overestimate the role of *nayas* and fall in the trap of *nayābhāsa*.

This point of similarity between Jainas and Ryle is also qualified by a difference. Ryle believes that the misleading character of a systematically misleading expression can be removed by restating the same content in a syntactical form adequate to it. Ryle in fact undertakes the programme of restating the contents of such misleading sentences in such a way that they are no more misleading. In terms of *naya* Ryle's position amounts to saying that some *nayas* happen to be inappropriate to the view they try to convey and in such cases the proper way to avoid *nayābhāsa* is to replace the given inappropriate *naya* by an appropriate one. This position, I believe, will not be accepted by Jainas. Because all *nayas* for them are appropriate though partially so. *Nayas* are partly *pramāṇa* (*pramāṇāṃśa*). They can be used for giving partially true-pictures of reality. This also relates with the Jaina world-view according to which everything is possessed with infinite properties, many of which are apparently contradictory. This world-view, I believe, may not be in tune with Ryle's position. Both will agree that philosophers commit fallacies (*nayābhāsas*) when they extend the modes of linguistic forms (*nayas*) beyond their logical limit. But their ways of evading the fallacies will be different, Ryle will try to replace inadequate modes by adequate ones. Jainas, on the other hand, will propose an all-inclusive mode of *syādvada* in which even contradictory expressions can be accommodated as perfectly in order.

Though these approaches are different in this way, one similarity remains namely both of them try to dissolve the issues created by vague, ambiguous and misleading nature of ordinary language within the frame of ordinary language itself. They do not try to devise any special technical language which is supposedly free from any defects that ordinary language is possessed with. This creates an image of Jainas as the defenders of ordinary language.

When we are concerned with ancient Indian approaches relevant to the analytical tradition of the west, it would not perhaps be proper to conclude the discussion without referring to the *lokāyata* approach. One observes that the *Lokāyata* approach can be correlated with two dominant trends in the western analytical tradition : positivism and the defence of common sense. Let us try to see how it can be so relevant.



(4) *Criticism of Metaphysics and a defence of common sense : Cārvāka approach*

Cārvāka or Lokāyata thinkers are not known for any systematic position on language in general, but if the Cārvāka criticism of the Vedic statements and the statements pertaining to God, Heaven, Soul etc. is taken to be an off-shoot of what could have been their general view of language, perhaps some conjectures can be made about their approach to language in general.

Carvakas' complaint against the Vedic statements is not very much that they give us some wrong information but rather that they are mostly meaningless or absurd. Cārvākas, for instance, ridicule Vedic pandits by saying "Jarpharī, Turpharī etc. are supposed to be scholarly expressions (amongst Vedic pandits)." Similarly, some of the arguments that Cārvākas advance against the metaphysical dogmas clearly indicate that Cārvākas are interested in pointing out non-sensical character of transcendent-metaphysical utterances, and not simply their falsehood.

The Cārvākas' argument against the belief in the Śrāddha ritual, for instance, can be restated as follows : (1) the belief in the Śrāddha-ritual assumes the form of the statement (A) : the oblation eaten in Śrāddha ritual really passes into the body of the ancestors for whom the ritual is performed. (2) If (A) makes sense, then it equally makes sense to say that (B) Śrāddha could be fruitfully offered to a man who is travelling abroad so that his hunger is automatically satisfied while in journey. (3) But B is absurd. (4) Hence, A must be absurd.

While making such arguments Cārvākas seem to be having in their mind the distinction between statements which presuppose empirical or worldly framework and those which transcend it. The former were supposed to be significant and the latter non-sensical. This indicates vaguely the criterion of meaningfulness that Cārvākas had in their mind, although they did not state it explicitly.

In fact the question of the criterion of meaningfulness (i.e., cognitive meaningfulness) is the question of the criterion of a statement being *pramāṇa* in some minimal sense, in the sense of being an instrument

of cognition. One can, therefore, try to draw some implications regarding Cārvākas' views on the criterion of meaningfulness from their theory of *pramāṇas*. There, however, we have to take seriously two different models attributed severally to *śūśikṣita cārvākas*. Let us call them the model of empirical testability and the model of the defence of common sense respectively.

### I. The model of empirical testability

According to this model, perception is accepted as one means to cognition, but inference is classified into two kinds : *Utpannapratīti* (empirically tested or testable) and *Utpadyapratīti* (transcendent)<sup>10</sup>. Inference of the former kind is accepted as *pramāṇa* (a means to cognition) but that of the latter kind is not. This position implies that a statement has to be either an observation statement or a conclusion of an inference of an empirically testable kind, in order to be a cognitively meaningful statement at all. This position is akin to that of logical positivism in the west. It helped Cārvākas to counter many metaphysical dogmas like that of soul, God and transmigration. But the position, when stretched a little further, led to solipsism and put some commonsense beliefs into question. At least this was the line on which the rival schools advanced their criticism of Carvaka epistemology.

### II. The Model of the defence of common sense

According to this model, too, perception is accepted as a *pramāṇa*. But inference now is classified differently. It is classified into *lokaprasiddha* (the one which does not exceed the bounds of common sense) and other *anumāna* (which exceeds the bounds of common sense)<sup>11</sup>. Again the inferences of the former kind are accepted as *pramāṇa* and the latter are not. This model is more inclusive than the first one. It can be used to counter the metaphysical dogmas like soul, transmigration and God; yet it does not lead to solipsism or scepticism as the first model does. This model is akin to the Moorian way of the defence of common sense, another dominant trend in the modern analytical movement.

### Epilogue

So far we discussed a few approaches to language and the world from classical Indian philosophy and their relevance to some of the

trends in western analytical tradition. The discussion reveals, I believe, that there is enough scope to do 'analytical philosophy' which has its roots in classical Indian philosophy. I, however, do not intend to suggest even indirectly that classical Indian philosophy was nothing but analytical philosophy in its true essence.

The Late Professor G. Mishra and his followers belonging mainly to Utkal University seem to have held that classical Indian philosophy does not consist of speculative metaphysics essentially but it is essentially logico-linguistic analysis. I do not think this is a correct estimate of Indian philosophy. The more puzzling thing is that they brand Śaṅkara's Advaitism too as an exercise in analytical philosophy and treat it as on par with the philosophy of Wittgenstein and Strawson.

According to a standard interpretation of Śaṅkara's *Advaita-Vedānta*, it is an Idealism par excellence. But unlike Western Idealism it does not depend upon the Berkeleyan thesis '*Esse est percipi*'. Now as metaphysical idealism it may be better treated as the *pūrvapakṣa* of an analytical exercise rather than as a specimen of it. The prospective analytical philosophy of Indian origin, therefore, should involve a critical assessment of *Advaitism*, comparable with the refutation of Idealism as G.E. Moore attempted in the west. But many a scholar of Indian philosophy are so much overwhelmed with the philosophical personality of Śaṅkarācārya that they tend to see each and every peak of western philosophy into the mirror of Śaṅkara's philosophy. This is a misleading attitude and needs to be considered cautiously.

In Indian philosophy we have to deal with a paradoxical situation. The uneconomic realism of Nyāya and the idealistic metaphysics of *Advaita-Vedānta*, which are in need of an analytical treatment are actually responsible for the development of various tools and devices of analytical thinking. But these tools and devices were used by them only for justifying their metaphysical dogmas, and not for transcending them. *Navya-nyāya* and *Nyāya-ghaṭita-vedānta* in this sense are the specimens of pseudo-analysis than of analysis proper<sup>13</sup>.

## NOTES

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein distinguishes in the *Tractatus* (propositions 5.32 to 5.328) between sign and symbol. Accordingly, the surface structure of propositions consists of signs, whereas the deep structure is made up of symbols. Wittgenstein also talks of a sign-language which adequately expresses the deep structure of propositions.
2. In this connection the following propositions from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* are relevant : 4.121, 4.1212, 4.126, 4.12721, 5.632, 5.641, 6.421, 6.522, etc.
3. "Meinong, Alexius", *Encyclopædia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards, Vol. 5, p. 261.
4. "Tasya viṣavaḥ svalakṣanam... tadeva paramārthasat", *Nyāyabindu*.
5. "Anyat sāmānyalakṣanam. So' numānasya viṣayaḥ" *Nyāyabindu*, *Op.cit.*, *Śabdārthaḥ kalpanā jñānaviṣayatvena kalpitāḥ, Pramānavārtika, Svārthānumāna*, 212.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Tasmād apohaviṣayamiti liṅgam prakīrtitam, Pramānavārtika, Op. cit.*, 45; *Tasmāt mithyāvikalpo'yam artheṣvekāmatagrahaḥ/Itaretarabhedo'sya bijam sainjñā yadarthikā Ibid.*, 72.
8. *Nyayasutra*, 2.2.68.
9. I have discussed the point in some more details in my paper "The Jaina doctrine of *Nayābhāsa*", *Sambhāṣā*, Nagoya University, Japan, Vol. 11 (1989).
10. Jayantabhaṭṭa attributes this model to *susīkṣita-tara* (sophisticated Cārvākas) in his *Nyāyamañjarī*. I have discussed this model and also the next one in some more details in an unpublished article "Cārvāka Theory of *Pramānas*; a restatement" (presented in a session of the Indian Philosophical Association, Bombay, 1990).
11. This model has been attributed to Cārvākas by Purandara as quoted by Kamalaśīla in his *Tattvasaṅgrahapañjikā*. Also see supra Note 10.
12. For my criticism of some of the claims made by the advocates of the G. Mishra school, see my reviews of the two books :
  1. *The Theories of Error* by B. Kar (Review published in the *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No. 3, April, 1980).
  2. *Vedānta-Paribhāṣā : An Analytical Study*, by G. P. Das (review published in *Ibid*, Vol. XV, No. 2, April, 1988).
13. This paper was presented in the All India Seminar on Language, Thought and Reality organised by the Department of Philosophy, University of Poona in February 1991.