

BOOK REVIEW - I

Misra, Rajnish Kumar : *Buddhist Theory of Meaning and Literary Analysis*;
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Rs.380/-

The book under review is apparently a result of collaborative research undertaken by a group of sixteen students of the Jawaharlal Nehru University from the Department of Linguistics, with a common interest in understanding rich ancient Indian past, especially available in well-known texts (pp xii-xiii). It attempts to present a systematic study of the thoughts of celebrated Buddhist philosophers in particular and of Indian philosophical traditions in general with reference to the theory of meaning. In doing this, emphasis is on interpreting the Buddhist conceptions of sign, *Sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*, *Apoḥā*, *Niṣedha* (negation), *Dharma* etc. and their interconnections in the light of world-word relationship. It strives to indicate its applicability in the field of linguistic analysis to such a literary poetical work as Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' and thereby bring out its contemporary relevance.

Very often one notices that when researches are conducted in the field of ancient Indian systems of thinking, inquiries pay less attention to inter-school and intra-school controversies. Analysis of a theory is given thinking as if it is homogeneous right from its inception and as if there is no difference between what predecessors advocate and what their successors present. This creates an impression that right from its start the theory remained uniform in a stereotype way, without any major conceptual change. Conceptual change, further, needs to be understood in the sense of growth and development or degeneration and decay. The present work, though it mostly seems to rely on secondary sources, fortunately pays attention to the aspects of controversy

among adherents of various trends of Indian philosophical thought. It also brings in elements of conceptual growth and development with reference to Buddhist theory of meaning. And for this it certainly deserves credit. It, however, seems to ignore degenerative and distortive aspect of the conceptual change with regard to it and the contribution which various controversies made in that direction.

In the present book Buddhist theory of meaning is outlined in the light of its treatment at the hands of Dinnāgā, Dharmakīrti, Śāntarakṣita and Ratnakīrti with special reference to Apoha as a method of linguistic analysis. On the background of the of the non-Buddhist traditions like Grammar (*Vyākaraṇa*), *Nyāya* and *Mīmāṃsā*, the relation between word and world in Buddhist thought is dealt with. The work also inquires into the views of the four major sub-schools of Buddhism and their metaphysical standpoints. And at the end it probes into the present relevance of the Buddhist theory of meaning.

The book consists of four chapters. The first discusses Indian theories of meaning along with their metaphysical stands, viz. The *Mīmāṃsā*, tradition upheld by Kumarila and Prabhakara (pp. 37-41), the *Nyāya* (pp.41-43), Jaina (pp.43-46) and Grammarians like Bhaṭṭhari (pp.27-36). On this background, in the second chapter, an attempt is made to sketch Buddhist conception of reality in general and the relation between cognition and expression in particular. The intra-school debate among Vaibhāṣikas, Sautrāntikas, Yogācārins (Vijñānavāda) and the Mādhyamikas (Śūnyavāda) with regard to the nature of reality and nature of cognition is elaborated. And further on this background, the method of negation (Nīśedha) is critically examined to acknowledge the growth and development of the concept of linguistic sign on the one hand and Apohā on the other. With this focus, in the third chapter an attempt is made to bring out the continuity of Buddhist thought, especially in the philosophy of Dinnāga as presented in his *Pramāṇa-samuccaya*, Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇa-vārtika*, *Tattva-samgraha* of Śāntarakṣita and *Apohasiddhī* of Ratnakīrti as outlined in the secondary works on which the study mostly relies. As observed earlier, the last chapter deals with

contemporary relevance of the Buddhist theory of meaning with reference to Wordsworth's poem. The work on the whole is well-conceived and brings out some important aspects of the philosophical and linguistic richness of the thought of the Buddhist tradition, without introducing any major distortion.

However, there are some shortcomings. An inquiry into philosophical thought cannot be properly conducted within the framework of linguistic studies alone. It seems to do injustice to basic metaphysical and logical considerations at stake, since they are often taken too simplistically. The present work seems to sideline or marginalise metaphysical, logical and methodological aspects of the Buddhist theory of meaning. Further, it also seems to ignore degenerative and distortive aspect of the Buddhist theory of Apohā, introduced especially at the hands and at the behest of adversaries of the Buddhist theory. An impression appears to have been created that Ratnakīrti's conception of negation (*Niṣedha*), Exclusion (*Apohā*) and the theory of meaning is the most clear and final development of it. However, the facts seem to indicate something different. Similarly, it is held that although Māhāyāna tradition is founded by Nāgārjuna, it is Diñnāga who is to be credited for introduction of the concept of negation (*Niṣedha*), if not of *Apohā* as well. This, perhaps, is not a justifiable claim. For, as is well known, it is Nagarjuna who for the first time emphasised and used the method of negation (*Niṣedha*), both in the form of *Prasajya-pratiṣedha* and *Paryudasa*. And later on, while interpreting them a schism is created in the followers of Nāgārjuna, especially Bhavya on the one hand and Buddhapālita or Chandrakīrti on the other, which also later on created a deep impact on Buddhist tradition in general. This is so especially because Śāntarakṣita is influenced by Bhavya and in the present work this fact appears to have been almost neglected.

Further, even though Diñnāga and Dharmakīrti have continuity of thought, their conceptions of language and conventional reality (*Samvṛtti sat*) is not the same. Nor the ways in which *samvṛtti sat* (conventional reality) and *Paramārtha sat* (ultimate reality) are related remain the same. Moreover, *samvṛtti sat* (p.95) does not mean vikalpa (doubtful and uncertain) or fictitious cognition necessarily, though it is our construction of images,

concepts, ideas, notions etc. But so too the difference between Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti (p.92) with regard to the definition of Pratyakṣa is very basic. Through introduction of an element of non-illusoriness (Abhrāntatva) in the definition of Pratyakṣa, Dharmakīrti emphatically concentrates on veridical perception in contrast to any perception at the hands of Dinnāga. The distinction is very crucial both metaphysically as well as epistemologically. But this aspect seems to have been completely ignored in the present work. There are certain avoidable repetitions e.g. exposition of the thoughts of *Vijñānāvāda* on pp. 74-75 is again repeated on pp. 146-47 or on p. 66 in the foot-notes *Nyaya-bindu* is said to be a work of Dinnāga, which is obviously wrong as it is of Dharmakīrti and not of Dinnāga. Similarly on p.70 *Vijñāptimātratā* doctrine is said to have been advocated by Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti, which is absolutely incorrect, because that doctrine was upheld by Sthiramati, Asanga and Vasubandhu. And Dharmakīrti, on the contrary, criticises it and has written a separate treatise entitled *Santānāntarasidhi* as a criticism of it. Further, on p.106 Dinnāga's and Bhartṛhari's views regarding language and meaning are stated to be the same, which seems to be contrary to the fact that Dinnāga criticises Bhartṛhari.

In spite of such flaws which could have been avoided, the author has rendered good service in exposing and bringing out for concerned scholars some important aspects of Buddhist theory of language and meaning. The work is appended with an extensive glossary, useful bibliography and an index, which are of great help to researchers. It is indeed a good example of collaborative research and deserves to be studied by the scholars of history of Indian philosophical ideas.

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