NYĀYA THEORY OF IMPLICATION AND INTERPRETATION
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1. Introduction

It is well known that in contemporary Western philosophy, especially under the influence of Gadamer, Ricoeur, and so on, hermeneutics and allied disciplines are assuming more and more significance. The influence of these hermeneutical theories has gradually been felt also on present day Indian thought. What, however, is not so well known even among Indian philosophers themselves is that India had a long and distinguished history of theories of interpretation. *Mimāmsa* system, for example, tried to lay down the rules of interpretation in order to arrive at the true meaning of the Vedas.[1] The discipline of Grammar, which again had a long history in India, reached its philosophical heights in the path-breaking works of Bharthari.[2] Philosophers of Grammar had to struggle with the problem of meaning and in some ways also with the question of interpretation. In the *Nyāya* system, discussions on the philosophy of language and theories of interpretation were carried on largely in the context of the discussions on *śabda* (word), as a means of valid verbal knowledge. There is no treatise exclusively on interpretation as such in the modern sense. Yet, on the basis of what the Naiyāyikas have contributed towards a philosophy of language, we can construct a theory of interpretation adequate to meet the philosophical challenges of today. The present essay is an attempt to develop such a

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[1]For a general idea of the various theories of meaning and interpretation, see K. Kunjunni Raja: *Indian Theories of Meaning*, Madras: The Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1963.

[2]For a summary of Bhartrhari's ideas and for bibliography, see Karl Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, vol. 5, 121-174.

theory of interpretation based on the *Nyāya* contribution on the philosophy of language in general and implication in particular.

For this purpose, first of all, an acquaintance with the context in which a *Nyāya* theory of interpretation may be developed is necessary.[3] Basically, this context is the prolonged and profound discussions of the *Nyāya* thinkers on *śabda*. According to the Naiyāyikas, the fourth means of valid knowledge is *śabda* (word). They explain the process of knowledge arising from *śabda*, i.e., verbal knowledge as follows:[4] first of all it is stated that the instrumental cause of such a verbal knowledge is knowledge of words. Here the knowledge of words which is the instrumental cause is the perception of words by the sense of hearing, or the knowledge of words which arises from seeing the script. The operation of the instrumental cause is the recollection of the meaning of words. The auxiliary cause is the knowledge of denotative function (*śakti*). Without the knowledge of denotative function (*śakti*), it is impossible to have recollection of the meaning of words. The final result of this process is verbal knowledge, which is the knowledge of the relation between the meanings of words.

2. Process of Verbal Knowledge

The actual instrumental cause of verbal knowledge is not words which are actually being known, but knowledge itself of words. The difference between these two positions is that in the first case words are actually uttered and in the second case, there is no need of actually uttered words, as for example, when a person who keeps silence writes down words we come to have the knowledge of words by seeing the script.

The operation of this instrumental cause is the recollection of the meaning of words (*padajanyapadārthasmarana*) and this recollection itself has to be produced by the knowledge of words. If it is stated that

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[3]The most recent study in this area is by B. K. Matilal: *The Word and the World*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1990.

[4]What follows is based on the section on implication (*laksanā*) in *Kārikāvali* of Viswanatha with the commentaries *Muktāvali, Dinakari* and *Ramarudri*, Atmaram Narayan Jere ed., Varanasi: Krishnadas Academy, 1988, 385-392; see also John Vattanky, *Nyāya Philosophy of Language, Analysis, Text, Translation and Interpretation of Upamāna and Śabda sections of Kārikāvali, Muktāvali and Dinakari*, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, Indian Book Centre, 1995.

only *padajanyapadārthajnāna* and not *padajanyapadārthasmarana* is the operation, then, if someone hears the word 'jar', for example, and then in the next moment he sees the thing 'jar', and has perceptual knowledge of the meanings of words, then he would have verbal knowledge.   But such a possibility is not accepted by anyone. Therefore, *padajanyapadārthasmarana* and not *padajanyapadārthajnāna* is said to be the operation of the instrumental cause, viz., *padajnāna*.

Here it should be noted carefully that if the qualifier *padajanya* is not given to *padārthasmarana*, the following difficulty arises: when a person hears a sentence and recollects the meanings of words by the knowledge of certain things which are other than the words themselves but which are related to the meanings of words, he would have verbal knowledge. In order to avoid this possibility, *padārthasmarana* should be qualified by *padajanya*.

Further, the recollection of the meanings of words should be produced by the knowledge of words with the help of the significatory function of words; otherwise, the following difficulty will arise: when one hears words like 'jar', etc., since these words inhere in ether one can have recollection of ether also. This is because the knowledge of one relatum (viz., word 'jar') produces the remembrance of the other relatum of the relation, viz., ether. Hence, one would have also the verbal knowledge also of ether. This difficulty is avoided when it is stated that the recollection of the meanings of words which is produced by the knowledge of words is to be taken in the sense that the recollection of the meanings of words is produced by the knowledge of words with the help of the significatory function of words.

3. Nature of Significatory Function (*vrtti*)

Now a question arises: what exactly is the nature of this significatory function (*vrtti*)? According to the Naiyāyikas, significatory function is either denotative (*sakti*) or implication (*laksanā*). These functions are in the form of relations that exist between words and their meanings. Literary critics accept *vyajnānā*, suggestions also as another form of significatory function. But the Naiyāyikas hold that suggestion is included in inferential knowledge.

4. Nature of Denotative Function (*sakti*)

Denotative function is the relation of a word with its meaning. However, in explaining the nature of this relation the ancient and modern schools of the Naiyāyikas differ. According to the former, denotative function of words is in the form of the will of God, that from this word this meaning is to be understood. Therefore, according to the old Naiyāyikas, terms like *nadi*, *vrddhi*, etc. (which are technical terms of grammar), coined by moderns only, have no denotative function. The modern Naiyāyikas, on the other hand, accept denotative function in terms such as *nadi*, *vrddhi*, etc., also since they assert that denotative function is in the form of will only and not necessarily only in the form of the will of God. From this it follows that, according to both old and modern Naiyāyikas, in well known words, such as 'jar', 'cloth', etc., there is denotative function in the form of the will of God. Further, it should be noted that, according to both the schools, from the *apabhramsa* words like *gargari* which means jar, one gets verbal knowledge merely by the erroneous knowledge of denotative function. A *Nyāya* theory of interpretation can, however, be developed only on the basis of the other significatory function, i.e., implication (*laksanā*). Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the nature of implication.

5. Nature of Implication (*laksanā*)

Implication is a relation with the meaning which is conveyed by the denotative function (*laksanā sakyasambandārtātparyānu-papattitah*). According to the old Naiyāyikas, either the incompatibility of semantic connection (*anvayānupapatti*) or the incompatibility of the intention of the speaker (*tātparyānu-papatti*) is the cause for postulating implication. As for instance, in the sentence *gangāyām ghosah* (meaning, 'there is a village on the Ganges'), it is not possible to have the semantic connection of the denoted meaning of the word *gangā*, viz., stream with the denoted meaning of the word *ghosa*, viz., village. Such an incompatibility of semantic connection is the cause of postulating implication of the word *gangā* in bank. But this cannot be the only cause of implication, for if it were the only cause of implication, then, there would be no implication in such instances as *yastih pravesaya* (meaning, 'make the sticks enter'). The reason is that there is no incompatibility of semantic connection of sticks with entering. But if the intention of the speaker is considered as the cause of implication,

then there could be implication here also, i.e., the word 'stick' has implication in one who carries the stick. The reason is that the intention of the speaker is not to admit sticks, but the persons who hold the sticks in order that they can take their food.

The modern Naiyāyikas hold that everywhere only the incompatibility of the intention of the speaker is the cause of postulating implication. This is because in the example of *gangāyām ghosah*, sometimes there can be implication for the word *gangā* in the bank and sometimes there can be implication for the word *ghosah* in fish. But which word is to be taken in the implied meaning can be determined only by reference to the intention of the speaker. Hence, the conclusion of the modern Naiyāyikas is that the impossibility of the intention of the speaker only is the cause of implication.

Implication is of two kinds: *jahatsvārthā* and *ajahatsvārthā*. *Jahatsvārthalaksanā* is that by which a word abandons its denoted meaning, i.e., in the verbal knowledge arising from it, the implied meaning is the object and not the denoted meaning. As for example, from the sentence *gangāyām ghosah,* there is the verbal knowledge in the form that there is a village on the bank. Here the denoted meaning of the word *gangā*, viz., stream, is totally abandoned; *ajahatsvārtha laksanā* is that in which the word does not give up its denoted meaning, i.e., verbal knowledge arising from it has the denoted meaning also as its object, as for example, *chatrino yānti*. Here the word *chatrin* has implication in the meaning of one group consisting of those having umbrellas and those not having umbrellas. So, in the verbal knowledge, the denoted meaning, i.e., those having umbrellas is not abandoned.

Here it should be noted carefully that the statement that the expression *chatrin* has implication in the meaning of one group consisting of those having umbrellas and those not having umbrellas is made, according to the system of the Grammarians. This cannot be admitted; the reason is that the expression *chatrin* consists of the stem *chatra*, meaning umbrella and the suffix *ini*, meaning that which is related. Therefore, since we get the knowledge of that which is related to umbrella from the words *chatra* and *ini*, we need not postulate denotative function for the expression *chatrin* in the meaning of that which is related to umbrella. Since the expression *chatrin* has no denotative function, it follows that it has also no implication.

According to the Naiyāyikas, however, there is implication for the word *chatra* in the meaning of the-state-of-being-one-group consisting of those having umbrellas and those not having umbrellas. The denoted meaning of the suffix *ini* is 'that which is related'. Thus, the whole expression means *chatrighatitaikasamudāyatvavanto gacchanti*, i.e., *chatrighati-taikasamudāyo gacchati*, i.e., a group consisting of those having umbrellas and not having umbrellas is going. However, it should be noted here that there is a prolonged discussion between the Grammarians and the Naiyāyikas whether there is denotative function on the expression *chatrin*; we cannot enter here into the details of this discussion.

It should be further noted that the generally accepted opinion of the Naiyāyikas is that where the denoted meaning of the word which has implication is totally abandoned in verbal knowledge, there the implication is *jahatsvārthā*, as in the case of the verbal knowledge in the form 'there is a village on the bank' (*tire ghosah*) arising from the sentence *gangāyām ghosah*. Where the denoted meaning of the word which has implication becomes the object in verbal knowledge as qualifier, there implication is *ajahatsvārthā* as in the case of the verbal knowledge in the form 'there is a village on the bank of the Ganges' (*gangātire ghosah*), arising from the sentence *gangāyām ghosah*. Here, the denoted meaning of the word *gangā* is a qualifier to bank. Some Naiyāyikas, on the contrary, hold that in this latter case there is *jahatsvārthā* implication and for them *ajahatsvārthā* implication is where the denoted meaning of a word which has implication becomes object in verbal knowledge as the principal qualificand.

Further, the Naiyāyikas do not admit implication in the determinant of the state-of-being-implied-meaning (*laksyatāva-cchedaka*); yet, such a determinant becomes the object of the remembrance and verbal knowledge arising from the word having implication. Then, a question arises as to how the determinant-of-the-state-of-being-implied-meaning (*laksyatāva-cchedaka*) becomes the object in remembrance and verbal knowledge without the knowledge of significatory function in it. The answer is that sometimes the knowledge of the implication for the word *gangā* in the sentence *gangāyām ghosah* is in *tira*, which is qualified by *tiratva*; sometimes such knowledge of implication is in *tira* which is qualified by *gangātiratva*. Both instances of the knowledge of

implication produce the remembrance and verbal knowledge of the respective characteristic qualifying *tira*.

An additional reason why implication is not accepted in *tiratva* in such instances as *gangāyām ghosah* is that implication in the form of *gangāpadamakyapravāhasamyoga* (conjunction of the stream, the denoted meaning of the word *gangā*) is not possible with the universal of *tiratva*, bankness.

Muktāvalikāra asserts that in a similar manner there is no denotative function in the determinant of the-state-of-being-denoted-meaning (*sakyatāvacchedakam*) also. The reason is that the knowledge of denotative function which is qualified by a particular characteristic produces the remembrance and verbal knowledge of that which is qualified by the same characteristic. Thus, the denotative function of the word 'jar' is known in jar which is the substratum of a particular characteristic, viz., jarness which is known.

Rāmarudra, however, first rejects this opinion of Muktāvalikāra, pointing out that if the denotative function is not accepted in the determinant of the-state-of-being-denoted-meaning, then, there would be no fixed characteristic for the denoted meaning in the verbal knowledge arising from the knowledge of denotative function, just as in the verbal knowledge arising from the knowledge of implication there is no fixed characteristic for the implied meaning. But, in the end, Rāmarudra shows that even if denotative function is not accepted in the determinant of the-state-of-being-denoted-meaning, there is a fixed characteristic for the denoted meaning for the verbal knowledge arising from the knowledge of denotative function.

So far *laksanā* in the form of direct relation of denoted meaning was explained. There is another kind of implication in the form of indirect relation of denoted meaning. This is called *laksitalaksanā*. Such an implication is included in *jahatsvārthā* implication. As, for instance, in the sentence *dvirepham ānaya*, the denoted meaning of the word *dvirepha* is *rephadvaya*. Now, *rephadvaya* is found in the word, *bhramara*, the denoted meaning of which is bee. Therefore, the word *dvirepha* has the implied meaning of bee by relation in the form the-state-of-being-denoted-meaning of the word *bhramara* consisting of *rephadvaya*, which is the denoted meaning of the word *dvirepha*. Hence, in the verbal knowledge from the word *dvirepha, rephadvaya*

which is its denoted meaning is totally abandoned and so this is an instance of *jahatsvārthalaksanā*.

In connection with this discussion on implication it should be pointed out that, according to the old Naiyāyikas, the word which is said to have implication does not bring about any verbal knowledge, but only the remembrance of the meaning. The verbal knowledge of the implied meaning is brought about by the other word conveying the meaning by denotative function which is mentioned together with the word which is said to have implication. As, for instance, in the expression *gangāyām ghosah*, the word, which is said to have denotative function, i.e., the word *ghosa* and which is mentioned together with the word which is said to have implication, viz., the word *gangā* brings about the verbal knowledge of the implied meaning, viz., bank.

On the contrary, the modern Naiyāyikas hold that from such sentences as *kumatih pasuh* (meaning, 'a dull-witted man is similar to an animal'), where there is implication in all the words, there arises verbal knowledge. This is testified by our experience. Therefore, they assert that the word which is said to have implication also brings about verbal knowledge.

Further, there is also an important discussion whether there is implication in sentences. The Naiyāyikas hold that there is no implication in sentences whereas the Mimāsakas hold that there is implication in sentences. The Naiyāyikas explain their position as follows: there is no implication in sentences, since implication is in the form of a relation with a denoted meaning and there is no denotative function in sentences. Therefore, in the sentences *gabhirāyām nadyām ghosah* (meaning, 'there is a village on the deep river'), Naiyāyikas accept implication for the word *nadi* in *naditira* (bank of the river) and the meaning of the word *gabhira* (deep) is connected with the river which is the part of another meaning, viz., *naditira* which is the implied meaning of the word *nadi*. If such an *ekadesānvaya* (that is, connection with a part of another meaning) is not accepted, then implication for the word *nadi* is in *gabhiranaditira* (bank of the deep river) and the word *gabhira* just shows the intention of the speaker.

But the Mimāmsakas reject this position because if implication is accepted only for the word *nadi*, then, the word *gabhira* will become meaningless. But the speaker certainly has the intention that the word

gabhira should also be meaningful. Therefore, they admit implication for the sentence *gabhirāyām nadyām* in the meaning *gabhiranaditira.* In order to meet the objection that there is no denotative function (*sakti*) in a sentence and, therefore, there is no implication in the form of *sakyasambandha* in a sentence, the Mimāsakas define implication as follows: implication is the relation with that which is conveyed by a word or a sentence. As, for instance, that which is conveyed by the sentence, *gabhirāyām nadyām*, is that the river is identical with that which is deep, its relation is in bank and so there is implication in the sentence also.

But such an opinion of the Mimāmsakas cannot be admitted. This is because when implication is accepted in the expression *gabhirāyām nadyām* as a whole, there cannot be any verbal knowledge in which *ghosah* is qualificand and *gabhiranaditiravrttitva* is qualifier since there is no word which brings about the knowledge of the-state-of-being-superstratum. Hence, implication cannot be accepted in the sentence.

6. *Nyāya* Theory of Interpretation

These discussions on implication provide us, with a sound basis for developing a *Nyāya* theory of interpretation. We have already pointed out that, according to *Nyāya*, the implied meaning should be related to the denoted meaning. Thus, in the stock example of 'there is a village on the Ganges (*gangāyām ghosah*)', the denoted meaning of Ganges is the flow of water. The implied meaning is the bank. Now, bank is connected with the flow of water. In *Nyāya* categories the connection between the flow of water and the bank is in the form of the relation of conjunction. This just means that the flow of water touches, or is conjoined with the bank. So, the implied meaning of the bank is in this way connected with the bank.

This connection between the denoted meaning and the implied meaning is crucial for a theory of interpretation. This is because, on the one hand, it presupposes that the interpreter understands the denoted or primary meaning of the text. This is the starting point of all kinds of interpretation. If a person does not understand the primary meaning of the text, he cannot start the enterprise of interpretation. In other words, the most fundamental duty of the interpreter is to equip himself towards an understanding of the primary meaning of the text. For this purpose he has to make use of whatever means available, such as grammar,

philology, etc. It is only when one is reasonably sure of the primary meaning of the text can one begin an interpretation of the text leading to the implied meaning.

On the other hand, by stipulating that the implied meaning should be connected with the denoted meaning, *Nyāya* imposes also certain limits on the extent of the implied meanings. First of all, an implied meaning cannot be just arbitrary: it cannot be totally divorced from the primary meaning of the text. If it is totally disconnected with the denoted or the primary meaning of the text, then it is not an instance of implied meaning but just arbitrary fanciful guess. Thus, in the *Nyāya* view an interpretation can never be purely subjective. In modern jargon the text may be free from the author at a particular time, but at no time an interpretation can be free from the text.

This attitude towards the process of interpretation has definite advantages. On the one hand, *Nyāya* never disparages the meaning of the text as intended by the author whatever may be the difficulties encountered in determining it. This also points to the fact that unlike some of the contemporary western theoreticians, the *Naiyāyikas* never give up the hope of arriving at the meaning of a text as intended by its author. Yet, *Nyāya* does not believe that the whole enterprise of the interpretation stops at the understanding of the meaning of the text as it is given to it by its author. It gives ample scope to delve deeply into all the possibilities of giving further meanings to the text. It only stipulates that such meaning cannot be purely arbitrary. This meaning should be based on, or connected with, the primary meaning and it is the ingenuity of the interpreter to find out the possible connections of the primary meaning. In this way the whole attempt of interpretation becomes both challenging and imaginative.

7. Conclusion

The avenues for applying such a theory of interpretation in the present context of classical Indian studies are quite attractive and significant. Today there is much confusion regarding the role of classical Indian culture as a whole and particularly about its values in contemporary India. There are, on the one hand, those who would like the classical Indian cultural traditions to be abandoned totally in favour of the technological culture of today. There are others who would want the early Indian traditions preserved even in their eccentricities which their

protagonists tend to consider even as essential. Such confrontations between various attitudes towards classical Indian culture need not even arise, if the *Nyāya* theory of interpretation is accepted and applied.

While there are many valuable elements in the early Indian traditions, which are the common heritage of the human society as a whole, it is equally true that the elements which are outdated and hardly consonant with rational thinking should be abandoned. Here also the meaning of the broad text of the Indian culture in general has to be understood before its implied meanings can be drawn out. In fact, such has been also the hallmark of the great works of the modern Indian interpreters of our classical tradition. Aurobindo, Vivekananda, or Radhakrishnan may not have explicitly developed a theory of interpretation but still they have blazed a trial of understanding of classical Indian traditions adapting them to their existential needs and aspirations; implied in their works is also a theory of interpretation which first tries to understand the broad text of Indian culture and then examines its implication for contemporary situations.

A *Nyāya* theory of interpretation has, in this way, broad applications which call forth both accuracy and originality in the handling of texts. There is no doubt that the consistent application of these theories which we have drawn from the *Nyāya* philosophy of language, in general, and of implication, in particular, can go a long way in enlightening our minds with regard to the problems of Indian philosophy as well as of Indian culture.