

For M.A;Semester-2
Indian Linguistic Trends (phil.cc-9)
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Theories of Anvitabhidhanavada and Abhitanvayavada

Indian epistemology unambiguously concedes to the fact that in the absence of the four factors viz, Pramata or the knower, Prameya or the knowable object, Pramana or the means of valid knowledge and Pramiti or valid knowledge of the object, any type of knowledge is a universal impossibility. Valid knowledge, in Indian epistemology, is called prama and the source of the same is called pramana. However Indian philosophers hold divergent views regarding the number of pramanas. Prabhakar Mimamsakas have accepted five pramanas, which are pratyaksa, anumana, upamana ,sabda and arthapatti and Bhatta Mimamsakas have accepted six pramanas including anupalabdhi with the above-mentioned five pramanas.

Mimamsakas say that sabda is a very important pramana. Sabda means verbal authority. "An intelligible sentence yields knowledge except when it is known to be the statement of an unreliable person (anapta-vakya). This is known as verbal testimony or simply testimony (sabda) or authority."

Majority of the schools of Indian Philosophy unanimously accepts that a sentence involves synthesis of concepts. But they are clueless about the process which enables the synthesis of these concepts. Are the words synthesised from before or does the synthetic construction take place later?

The first view , i. e. , it is the synthesised concepts (before) that give rise to the expression is known as Anvitabhidhanavada . The second view that

the general concepts used in a sentence are subsequently synthesised (after or later) together is known as Abhihitavayavada .

The above two views are advocated by the two rival schools of the Mimamsa , viz. the Guru School and the Bhatta School respectively. The first theory (Anvitaabhidhanavada) has been formulated by Prabhakara in his Brhati Tika. The second theory (Abhihitavayavada) is propounded by Kumarila Bhatta in his Slokavartika .

The Main Points of Distinction Between the Two Theories:

According to Kumarila Bhatta and his followers , all words convey their own meanings separately .That is to say , each word first presents only a general concept as indicated by the denotative power (sakti) of the word. For example , the word Cow denotes only a Cow – in – general (go-samanya) as unrelated to another word. The different words become related together by a synthetic construction (samsarga maryada) . The synthesis takes place in accordance with rules of Akanksha (expectancy) , Asatti (juxtaposition) yogayata (compatibility) and Tatparya (intention of the speaker) . Thus the meaning of the sentence arises from a synthesis of the words . This view ,i. e. , that which is expressed (abhihita) is construed by mutual synthesis of words (parasparika anvaya) is known as Abhihitavayavada .

Prabhakara and his followers , on the other hand , maintain that the words expressed are already related together and they collectively generate the meaning in an automatic way . This view is known as Anvitaabhidhanavada .

According to this theory , it is not the case that words are said first and that synthesis made later on . As a matter of fact , there is no such thing as an unrelated word . An isolated word (divorced from all relation) is a mere abstraction . For example , take the word 'cow' . We first know the meaning of the word cow only by its practical usage , i. e. “ Bring the cow” and a cow is brought , “ Take away the cow “ and the cow is taken away . It is by means of observation of such behaviour of bringing and taking that someone becomes acquainted with the meanings of such

words as 'bring' 'take away' 'cow' etc. A word, e. g. 'cow' is never used in isolation. From the very beginning, the meaning of the word is understood as related to some other thing. Hence there is no need of postulating an additional synthesis or construction over and above the related meanings.

The distinction between the two views has been made clear by Partha Sarthi Mishra in his Nyaya Ratna Mala in this way, "While you (Anvitabhidhana-vadins) say that a word denotes a qualified (vishista) meaning, we (Abhihitavaya-vadins) say that a word denotes only a simple unqualified (svarupa-matra) meaning.

According to the former, the meaning of a sentence is nothing but the related meaning. According to the latter, a sentence is nothing but a construction of the meaning of words.

According to the Anvitabhidhanavada a word does not denote a bare concept, but also possesses a relational aspect which is inherently present in the very meaning of a word. For example, the word 'cow' must always be related to some other words e. g. 'the cow is white' 'the cow is grazing', 'bring the cow', 'feed the cow', etc. Thus the 'cow' always stands in some relation to other concepts.

The above view of the Anvitabhidhanavada is criticised by the Abhihitavayavadins, who accuse the former of making an unnecessary assumption, i. e. of postulating a double denotative capacity in words, i. e. the meaning aspect and the relational aspect.

The former retort by saying that if they assume two capacities their opponents assume three.

Anvitabhidhanavadins hold that the words of a sentence present meanings (as indicated by their grammatical and syntactical features such as number, gender, case-ending, tense, juxtaposition etc.) and they (the words) are sufficient to carry the load of the meaning like the bearers of a palanquin.

They do not postulate any intermediary between the co-related words and the meaning of the sentence. The meaning of a sentence, according

to them , is nothing but the meanings of the words mutually related . No further operation is necessary to get the Vakyartha . The meaning of a sentence is only the mutually related meanings of words . Hence no separate power need to be hypothesised to exist in synthetic activity .

The Abhihitavayavadins on the other hand maintain that the primary denotative power of words is to reveal only a general content and not the relational aspect . The meanings when strewn together like a garland of flowers give rise to a verbal cognition. The constituent words of a sentence present only their isolated meanings, which are combined according to syntactical rules (i. e. juxtaposition etc.) and the meanings are then brought under a synthetic or constructive process which gives the intended meaning .

Thus according to Abhihitavayavadins , the words or terms in a sentence are not the immediate instruments of verbal cognition . They are only the mediate cause. The immediate cause of verbal cognition is the knowledge of the meanings of words .

Partha Sarathi Mishra in his ' Nyaya Ratna Mala ' gives the gist of Abhihitavayavada by saying that it is not the words or sentences themselves that generate verbal cognition ; it is the construed meanings of words put together that give the meaning of a sentence .

The meaning of a sentence is thus regarded as dependent on the meaning of words . But a question arises here . When a child understands the meaning of a sentence e.g. " bring a glass of water " by means of repeated observations of such acts as bringing and taking away of particular things , the meaning of the sentence is understood as a whole without the knowledge of the meaning of constituents . How can it be said then that there can be no verbal cognition without previous knowledge of the meanings of words ?

The reply is that though , one may be able at times to understand or guess the meaning of a particular sentence taken as a whole by observation of particular behaviour in life , he cannot know the

meanings of innumerable sentences unless he is acquainted with the meanings of the words used therein .

The meaning of a sentence can be apprehended only by a knowledge of the meaning of words . In the absence of such knowledge there can be no verbal cognition . That is why one does not understand the meaning of sentences in an unknown language.

Thus the controversy between Anvitabhidhanavada and Abihitanvayavada seems to be more a matter of emphasis than of fundamental difference . The one puts stress on the function of words, the other puts stress on the synthesis of meanings. But there is no watertight compartment between words and meanings . They are only two different sides of the same coin .

As Dr. D. M. Dutta puts it in his ' Six Ways of Knowing ' , the central issue of the controversy is whether construction (anvaya) precedes expression (abhidhana) or follows it . He offers a novel suggestion in this connection . While the one (Anvitabhidhanavada) is speaker - oriented (true from the speaker's point of view) , the other (Abihitanvayavada) is hearer - oriented (true from the standpoint of the hearer) . Thus the two approaches though apparently contradictory and incompatible may be reconciled and synthesised together .

THANK YOU