

Methods of Sentential Understanding in Indian Philosophy

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Abstract

The means of language is to succeed a fruitful communication. A communication becomes fruitful when listener comprehends the speakers intended significance. At the point when a speaker and a listener have a common place with similar linguistic convention, speaker uses sentences to communicate something and listener grasps the intended meaning thereof by hearing the sentence. How the meaning is conveyed through sentence? Language is a tool through which knowledge of the speaker is transferred to the hearer. Hearing sentences from authentic person produces the cognition in hearer. Now the question is how the sentences become intelligible to a hearer. Before answering this question we should discuss briefly about what a sentence is. This paper is focused on nature of sentence. Is the collection of word-meaning sentence or is it beyond something that. There are two views in Indian philosophy about sentence. One is *Akhaṇḍapakṣavāda* and other is *khaṇḍapakṣavāda*. *Akhaṇḍapakṣavādin*s claim that sentences is used as a whole but not simply as isolated words. The sentence as a whole can express the exact intention of the speaker but isolated words cannot express the speaker's intention in proper manner. According to *khaṇḍapakṣavādin* sentence is the collection of words that combine to express the meaning, and meaning of a sentence is dependent on the constituent word-meaning. They think that why we use a sentence for expressing something, the function of a sentence cannot performed by its constituent words if they stands as isolated.

Keywords: word, meaning, sentence, cognition, relation, denotative power

Introduction

Indian Philosophers emphasize on the nature and function of sentence-meaning, but are unanimous about the origination of meaning of sentence. Two main approaches are found on the problem of meaning. One is known as *khaṇḍapakṣa* and other *asakhaṇḍapakṣa*. Those who think that sentences are just a collection of words combined to express the meaning of sentences (*ekārtho padasamuha vākyam*), are the supporter of *khaṇḍapakṣavāda*. According to this view, a word is taken as an autonomous unit of thought and sense and sentence is the concatenation of words. Some thinkers believes that sentence meaning is part less, i.e. Indivisible (*nirāvayava vākyārtha*), are known as *Akhaṇḍapakṣavādin*. In this paper a humble attempt will be made to highlights these two approaches.

If we look at ancient philosophy of language, we found that most of the philosophers and grammarians discussions are centered around word-meaning. For example, in Nyāya-sūtra the nature of an individual word has been discuss. Function of sentential understanding has been discussed in detail by later Naiyāikas. Pāṇini, Kātyayana and Patañjali the three teachers of grammarian school concerned mainly about the derivation of correct forms of words namely *sādhu-śabda*. Acharya Bhartṛhari of the same school on the other hand elaborates the understanding of sentences i.e., *śābdavodha*. But Mimāṃsakas started a detailed study of sentences and sentence-meaning in a different way.

Sentences are naturally different from words. Pāṇiṇian grammar explains that a word is a syntactically characterized expression which ends with suffix, nominal or verb (*sup-tingantam padam*),¹ while Navya-nyāya theory explains that *pada*, has semantic power to refer to objects (*śaktam padam*)². According to them suffixes are also taken as words, since they are meaningful. For example, the word “*gaccati*” taken as ‘*gamanānukūla kṛitimān*’ stands as a sentence for the Naiyāikas. The suffix “*ti*” indicates present tense singular number and refers to a third person as subject. “*gaccati*” is a considered as sentence to Naiyāikas, because it is composed of more than one unit of meaningful utterances related syntactically and their meanings are related semantically. Nyaiyāikas argument in this matter stand as: words are syntactically and semantically different from a sentence. Word is syntactically simpler expression to constitute a sentence. Semantically a sentence presents cognition of mutual relations following the order of words.

Āchārya Bhartṛhari gives a wide picture of sentence through explaining the characteristics of a sentence. According to him, eight possible features of a sentence are to be - “*Ākhyāta śabda samghāta jāti samghāta bartini ekenavayaba śabdah kṛmah buddhyānusamhiti padamādhyam pṛithakasarvam padam, sākāṅkṣha*”³-VP 2/1/2.

This verse indicates eight different theories of sentence. A sentence may be (1) 'ākhyāta' or the verb, (2) 'saṃghāta' or the collection of words, (3) 'jāti saṃghātvartini' or the universal inherence in the collection, (4) 'ekenāvayava śabda' or the one indivisible word, (5) 'kṛma' or the sequence, (6) 'budhyānusamḥiti' or the unification in the buddhi or intellect, (7) 'padamadyam' or the first word, (8) 'prithaka sarvam padam sakansamityapi' or each word requiring the others for their mutual relation.

These eight theories are classified into two groups on the basis of their acceptance of indivisibility of sentence or divisibility of sentence into real individual words. The universal inherence in the collection of words (jātiḥ saṃghātabartini), the one indivisible word (ekenāvayavasabdaḥ) and the unification in the mind (vuddhyānusamḥritiḥ), these three theories represents akhandapakṣavāda. Other five theories, viz, the verb (ākhyātasabdaḥ), the sequence of the words (kramah), the collection of words (saṃghātaḥ), the first word (padamadyam) and each word requiring the others (prithaka sarvapadam sākāṅksam) represents khandapakṣavāda.

Akhaṇḍapakṣavāda and khaṇḍapakṣavāda

Philosophers are divided into two groups in giving primacy either to a sentence or to an individual word. 'Akhaṇḍapakṣavādin', claim the primacy for the sentence while other is known as 'khaṇḍapakṣavādin', who think that individual words as autonomous units having isolated meanings and a sentence as a concatenation of word-units. Pūrvamīmāṃsakas and Naiyāikas are known as khaṇḍapakṣavādin. According to them sentence is the collection of words that combines mutually to express the meaning of a sentence, depending on the constituent word-meaning. They state why we use a sentence for expressing something, hence the function of a sentence cannot be performed by its constituent words if they stands as isolated or individual. According to akhaṇḍapakṣavāda, a sentence is a unitary whole, it is indivisible. Acharya Bhartrhari is the follower of this hypothesis. Akhaṇḍapakṣavādin claims that a sentences is used as a whole but not as combination of isolated words. A whole sentence can express the exact intention of the speaker but isolated word cannot express the speaker's intention in proper manner. For example 'gāmānya', in this sentence the word 'ānaya' expresses something is to be brought. But this word cannot express who is supposed to bring or what is supposed to be brought. The word 'gām' also cannot express the intention of the speaker. In this matter the speaker's intention for uttering the sentence 'gāmānaya' indicating that the act of bringing a cow been performed by somebody. (goniṣṭha ānayanukūla kṛitimān ayam)

Indeed, among the followers of khaṇḍapakṣavāda who acknowledge the reality of words there are two unique perspectives in regards to the idea of verbal understanding emerging from a sentence. Some Naiyāika-s and the Bhāṭṭa school of Mīmāṃsaka-s hold the abhihitānvaya hypothesis, as per the theory;

according to this theory we first recollect the isolated word-meanings and afterward a collective memory express the same as mutually connected. Syntactically related word-meanings comprise sentence-meaning. In a sentence each word performs the task of conveying its own isolated meaning, and stops with that; the syntactic relation is conveyed by the word-meanings. Words do not convey the relation. The Mimāmsaka-s of the Prābhākara School on the other hand acknowledge the *anvitāvidhāna* hypothesis which is an advance on the past one. As indicated by this the words themselves convey the associated sentence-meaning gradually, the individual words do not convey any meaning except in the context of a sentence, and a word must always be associated syntactically with an injunctive verb, which denotes that, when words are interconnected, they are capable of themselves to deliver sentence meaning.⁴

Akhaṇḍapakṣavāda

As proposed by Bhartrihari, *śabda* is indivisible and the meaning is also likewise unified. Bhartrihari characterized *śabda* as sentence. Presently an inquiry might rise that on the off chance that *śabda* taken as *akhaṇḍavākya*, how Bhartrihari make sense of the individual *padas* and *varṇas*? That's what Bhartrihari's answer would be syntactic *padas* and *varṇas* are acknowledged to him yet these are just the necessary resources to the end of sentential understanding. *Varṇa* comprises *pada*, *padas* comprise *vākya*. But *varṇas* and *padas* constituent of *vākya* are not real since such divisions are only meant for understanding and are actually imposed. Meaning of a word may manifest sentence-meaning but they have no objective reality. He states, “*pade na varṇa vidyante varṇesvavayava hi ca/vākyat padanamatyantarji pravireko na kascana*”⁵ (VP-1.1.73) on his commentary text *Vākyapadiya*. Sentence is an integral unit. Sentence meaning is an integration of the meaning of individual words. This division of sentence (words, root, and suffix) is imaginary or *kalpita*. “*Vyaptimaisca laghuscaiva vyavahdrah padasrayah/loke sāstre ca karyydrtham vibhagenaiiva kalpitah*”⁶ (VP1.2.344).

Bhartrihari has given the example of cognition or *jñāna* which can clear the concept. We all know that *jñāna* is *akhanda* (indivisible) and *nirākāra* (formless) but existence of *jñāna* refers to some object or *viśaya*. The difference of cognized objects (jneya *biśayavinnatā*) are found on *jñāna*. Hence, we use different references for different cognition, such as- *ghatajñāna*, *patajñāna* etc. Similarly *śabda* is one and indifferent but it is represented with different forms of *varṇa-pada-vākya*. Bhartrihari gives another example in *svopanjatikā*. ‘*Pancavrikṣa*’- means five trees. Five trees are different from each other and for the objective differences we have five different cognitions. But when we use the term ‘*banam*’ we have cognition of whole and it appears as one simple cognition. So it can be said that the difference and the indifference both are the different forms of *śabdattva*.

As per Bhartṛihari sentence is *nirāvayava*, *nirbhāga* or partless, indivisible. *Sāvayava* or *sakhaṇḍasabda* are not genuine. Yet, question might raise that how this *nirāvayavasabda* shows up as *sāvayava*? Bhartṛihari explains this by two models. At the point when an individual see a tree from significant distance, because of distance he doesn't see obviously the parts of the tree. That the object might show up as an elephant or a person in that individual's discernment. However, after this perception when the individual focuses on that object and attempts to see over and over he can see the tree. All things considered, first object appears in person's cognition as *ayathārthajñāna* or erroneous cognition and then it is cognized as *yathārtha*. Thus, a similar item can appear as *asyathārtha* and *ayathārtha*. Also it tends to be same for the cognition of *vākya*. Bhartṛihari gives one more example to explain this. If a person enter a low lighted room from the highlighted outside, then because of absence of adequate light he may see a rope as a snake. After that when his eyes are acclimated to the light he can see the legitimate item i.e., rope. Here additionally the primary knowledge of *ayathārtha* and at other point of time the knowledge on same item shows up as *yathārtha*. Similarly *vākya*s actually *akhaṇḍa*, *nirbhāga*, *akrama* but it appears as *sakhaṇḍa*, *savibhāga* and *sakrama*. Due to *śakti-sāṃkārya* of *dhvani*, it appears as *padāvayava*, *varṇāvayava*, etc, but those who have the knowledge of *sābdatatva* they can understand *akhaṇḍa nirāvayava vākya*. Acārya Maṇḍan Misra accepts this concept. He also admits the *dhvani-viparyāsa*. He states, “*dhvanayah sadrasatmano viparyasasya hetavah/ upalambhakamevestam viparyayasasyakaranam*”⁷. (Sphotasidhi, Mandan Misra).

Āchārya Bhartṛihari admitted this view of *akhaṇḍapakṣavādin*. Bhartṛihari has given an example to explain this view.

*Prthan nirdistatattvanām prthagārthānupatinām
Indriyanām yathā kāryam rte dehānna labhyate/
Tatha padanām sarvesām prthagārthānupatinām
Vākyebhyah pravibhaktānām arthavattā na vidyate*⁸ (VP 2/420).

Our sense organs (*indriya*) can reveal their respective objects when they are connected to our body, if they are separated from the body, they cease to reveal their respective objects. Similarly words can express their meanings only when they are situated in a sentence, if they are separated from the sentence they cease to express their meanings.

Grammarians analyze sentence in a different way. They accept the *dhatvārtha* or *kriyārtha* as the primary qualificand in a sentence. Hence, according to them, the paraphrasing of this sentence is - *rāma-niṣṭha-kartritva-nirapaka-pākānukala (pākajanaka)-kṛtiḥ*. Mimāṃsakas on the other hand accept *bhāvanā* i.e., the motivational principle as the primary meaning of a sentence. According to them paraphrasing of the sentence “*rāmah pacati*” is - *rāmanisṭha-kartritva-nirapaka-pākānukūla-bhāvanā*⁹.

Both these theories acknowledged that the necessary conditions for syntactic relation between words in a sentence are mutual expectancy (*ākāṅkṣā*), consistency (*yogyatā*) and proximity (*sannidhi*) and also recognized the importance of contextual factors and the intention of the speaker in determining the meaning of words mentioned as *tātparyā*¹⁰.

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