A DIALOGUE ON INDIAN THEORIES OF LANGUAGE

(National Seminar Proceedings)

Co-Ordinator & Chief Editor
Dr. A. Girija

Department of Sanskrit Vyakarana
Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit
Kalady - 683574, Kerala

Scientific and in depth study of the problems of generative Grammar that is in agreement with Paniniyan Grammar and Linguistics while creating the new words to suit the needs of the timers is the most relevant topic today. The department of Vyakarana, took the responsibility in conducting 3 day National Seminar with the cooperation of all the faculties and departments interested in the topic. This volume presents twenty contributions to this field of study which were presented at the national seminar, Department of Vyakarana, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady, conducted from 3rd to 5th March 2015. The papers cover a wide range of subjects, both chronologically and thematically. Most of the students concern aspects of Paniniyan Grammar, with respect to Panini's Grammar proper and including Patanjali's Mahabhasyaand Bhartrhari's Vakyapadiya.

The Relation Between Word and Meaning Śree Śankara's Perspective

Dr. V. Vasanthakumari
Associate Professor,
Dept. of Vedanta, S.S.U.S.Kalady.

All Indian philosophical systems have their own explanation on the relation between word and its meaning. The philosophical terms can be understood only by the correct understanding of their meanings. If words which are applied to the objects of philosophical discourse do not have the same meaning as when applied to the objects of ordinary mundane language, then exact nature of these objects becomes very difficult to define. Realizing these difficulties sree sankara, the great Advaita philosopher has tried to explain the technical terms in Advaita Vedanta using secondary and metaphorical meanings apart from their primary meaning. In Chāndogyopanisad Bhāṣya he says: the difference between words and their meanings are subjected to change. अभिधानाभिधेयभेदस्य विकारत्वात्।[1]

In his Vakyavrtti[2] Śree Śankara states that meaning of a statement is generally be formed either through the relation of words (samsarga) or through the relation of noun and adjective (viśeṣaṇa - viśeṣya bhāva). The statement तम् अश्वमानय। (bring that horse) makes its meaning through the relation of samsarga and the statement सुगन्धं नीलोत्पलम्। (the fragrant blue lotus) forms its meaning through the relation of viśeṣaṇa - viśeṣya bhāva. But in statements such as 'Tatvamasi' there are no such relations. Here the identity of jeevatma and paramatma is intended to be established and it can be established only by applying lakṣaṇa. Hence he accepts three types of meanings such as primary, secondary and metaphorical meanings.

The secondary meaning of a word is essentially connected with its primary meaning and operates only when the literal meaning is incoherent. All words have their own primary meanings which are conveyed by the words themselves. Secondary meaning is resorted to only when the primary meaning does not do full justice to the context. Śree Śankara says:- In a figurative use a word conveys some sense

Varying as far as possible between the senses proximate to and remote from its primary sense. लक्षणा च यथासंभवं सन्निकृष्टेन विप्रकृष्टेन वा स्वार्थसंबन्धेन प्रवर्तते।[3] In the case of superimposition (अध्यास) the idea of something is superimposed on something else, so that the figure of speech here involves a departure (विप्रकृष्टा), where as in the case of the viśeṣaṇa (adjectival use) a word denoting a whole is made to imply a part of itself so that the lakṣaṇa (figure of speech) involves proximity (सन्निकृष्टा). So words indicating the whole are seen to be used with regard to the parts as well; as in the case of a cloth or a village. समुदायेषु प्रवृत्ताः शब्दाः अवयवेष्वपि प्रवर्तमाना दृष्टाः पटग्रामादिषु[4]

But it is a fact that when the secondary meaning is understood, the primary meaning of the word is never forgotten. Thus the special extension of the primary ordinary sense of the word must always have its justification only in the context of relevant situation, and with direct reference to the primary meaning.

With regards to philosophical discourse, usually those words which function in both in ordinary mundane context and religious context; primarily signifies a secular meaning. Generally it is this secular meaning which develops first determines the common definition of the word. When such a word is employed in religious discourses, its meaning is an adaptation of the primary secular meaning. Śree Śankara says: Without resorting to

conventional words and their meanings, it is not possible for the scripture to explain something that is unknown. न च लौकिकपदपदाश्रय-णव्यतिरेकेणागमेन शक्यमज्ञातं वस्त्वन्तरमवगमयितुम्।[5]

In case a sentence has various meanings, one of them will be the actual meaning and the rest will be opposing it. But it is not an accepted rule with those who fix up the rule with the accurate meaning of a sentence that the same passage will have various meanings. i.e. one actual meaning and the rest opposing it, for unity is maintained only when the sentences have the same meaning. एकस्य वाक्यस्यानेकार्थत्वम्। सति चानेकार्थत्वे स्वार्थश्च स्यात्, तद्विघातकृच्च विरुद्धोऽन्योऽर्थः। न त्वेतत्- वाक्यप्रमाणकानां विरुद्धमविरुद्धं च एकं वाक्यम्, अनेकमर्थं प्रतिपादयतीत्येष समयः, अर्थैकत्वाद् हि एकवाक्यता।[6] So he says that the statements such as अयमात्मा ब्रह्म,'अहं ब्रह्मास्मि etc. which show unity of jiva and Brahman are to be taken in their primary sense and not secondary sence. But technical terms in Advaita Vedanta are explained by Śree Śankara by applying both primary and secondary meanings. The term mātā is commonly meant as mother. But for highlighting all the qualities that a mother should possess he defines the term as मातृमान्। (माता यस्य विद्यते पुत्रस्य सम्यगनुशास्त्री सा मातृमान्)[7] He has concentrated on the propriety of words and meanings. The statement सत्यमेव जयति। which is generally meant as truth alone wins, but he had changed its meaning as सत्यमेव जयति।[8] because according to him truth independent of man, undergoes no success.

Śree Śankara provides multiple meanings to most of the words to simplify the word meaning which is more appropriate to the context. The general meaning of the word प्रमिति is accurate notion or conception i.e. knowledge, but he gives meanings such as संवित् or स्वयंप्रभा। The primary meaning of the term मेधा (which

is synonym of buddhi) is buddhi but in Aitareyopanis.ad bhas.ya,

he accepts secondary meaning i.e. ग्रन्थधारण सामर्थ्यम्[9] i.e. the power of grasping and retaining in the memory the essence of the text. The term ज्ञानं is commonly used in the sense of knowledge. But according to Śree Śankara ज्ञानं is knowledge of Brahman or Atman gathered from the teacher and the śastra शास्त्रतः आचार्यतश्च आत्मादीनामवबोधः।[10]

The term विज्ञानं is primarily meant as विशेषतः ज्ञानं। In the Gītabhaṣya Śankara gives its meaning as विशेषतः आत्मज्ञानानुभवः। But in his Aitareyopaniṣad bhāṣya he gives another meaning as per his own interest कलादिपरिज्ञानम् विज्ञानं।[11] The term मनीषा is also used as a synonym of Buddhi. But Śankara he gives the secondary meaning the 'freedom of thinking'. Māyā is the key concept of śankara's philosophy and it is commonly used in the sense of illusion and is generally interpreted in a negative sense. But according to Śankara it is a positive power of Brahman responsible for the illusory projection of the world. It is dissimulation, some sort of false deportment by which a man appears outwardly in one manner and acts in another माया नाम बहिरन्यथात्मानं प्रकाश्यान्यथैव कार्यं करोति सा माया मिथ्याचाररूपा।[12]

Similar to this the term अज्ञानं does not mean just ignorance or absence of knowledge but a positive, something responsible for conscious activities pertaining to all fields except that of the knowledge of the unity of jīva with Brahman अज्ञानं नाम कर्तव्याकर्तव्यादिविषयमिथ्याप्रत्यरूपः।   The essential nature of a word

lies in its significative power and it is inherent in words themselves. Śree Śankara says:- Words are connected with the general characteristics and not with the individuals. To establish his doctrine of vivarta he gives metaphorical explanation on prapanca as प्रपञ्च्यते विस्तार्यते विवर्तत इति प्रपञ्च: । in Lalitatriśati bhāṣya.

All the afore mentioned explanations of Śree Śankara denote that he has utilized his freedom in selecting meaning of words or sentences for interpreting the incomprehensive technical terms in Advaita vedanta, Śree Śankara through his works provided the metaphorical or secondary meaning hidden behind the primary meaning which enabled a better understanding of Advaita Vedanta.

References

1. Chāndogyopaniśad śānkara bhāṣya- VII-1-2
2. Vakyavrtti- 38
3. Brahmasuūtra S bh- IV -1-5-6
4. Ibid- III- 3-4-9
5. Brhadaranyakopanisad Sbh- II-1-20
6. Ibid
7. Ibid -IV- 1-2
8. Mundakopanisad Sbh -II-1
9. Aitareyopanisad Sbh- III- 1-2
10. Bhagavadgita -Sbh - III- 41
11. Aitareyopanisad - Sbh -III- 1-2
12. Pranopaniṣad Sbh- I-16