

Language and Reality: a Wittgensteinian Reading of Bhartrhari

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Notwithstanding differences in the metaphysical presumptions, approaches and philosophical aims of Wittgenstein and Bhartrhari there are points where their thoughts converge on Language and Reality. The crux of the problem is this: whether words (sentences) in order to become meaningful necessarily denote something external or not? In other words, is there one-to-one relationship between word and object as its meaning? The problem is not whether any word signifies an object as its meaning but actually as to whether this signification could be taken as the exclusive criterion for judging the meaningfulness of a word? The problem gets murkier when there is an acceptance that there is a realm about which nothing can be said. Although Bhartrhari and Wittgenstein have expressed very similar thoughts on this issue which will be discussed in this talk, it is pertinent to point out that here I'm neither looking for Wittgenstein in Bhartrhari nor Bhartrhari in Wittgenstein, but trying to present a perspective which presents them in similar garb while not ignoring their differences. The broader outline of the discussion, with which we are concerned with, has to do with the reception of picture theory, language-game, and the inexpressible in Bhartrhari.

Bhartrhari holds the *Tractarian* thesis that the language and reality (world) share the same logical structure as he maintains that language is the only way to know and express reality. There is no possibility of knowledge except as accompanied by language (VP I §123). That is, "No object which is not expressed in words exists" (Bhate 1993: 67). The world of objects and the world of words cannot be cognized independent from each other (Patnaik 1994: 37) as there is a fusion between language and reality (Matilal *Perception*: 397).

But the question arises: how does the fusion between language and reality take place? One way is to maintain reality as an indivisible whole which corresponds to language as an indivisible unity. The other way is to keep analyzing language and world till the simplest is achieved which is further unanalysable. Bhartrhari seems to endorse the former method as compared to the latter which operates in earlier Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein's Picture Theory emphasises on actual or possible correspondence between elementary propositions and elementary facts for derivation of meaning. Bhartrhari unlike Wittgenstein holds that neither propositions are analyzable into atomic propositions and proper names nor world consists of facts which are further analyzable into atomic facts and objects. Nonetheless, Bhartrhari seems to endorse 'propositions as pictures' since for him, "In life the word functions by becoming identified with the thing denoted by it" (VP II §130a). And he maintains that word is the sign for external as well as internal objects (VP I §126). For Bhartrhari a proper name like Devadatta conveys its complete meaning as an expression because here the word-meaning relationship is permanent (VP II §§363-366). Thus we see that in Bhartrhari the picture theory is endorsed even before its inception!

Bhartrhari concedes that his identification between word and its meaning has its limitation as the word does not signify all the qualities ascribed to the object. Bhartrhari holds that the word 'pot' does not denote the shape (and

such other attributes) of objects like pots, because it denotes merely the object divested of its attributes. The attributes are conveyed incidentally (VP II §123). That is to say, although a word functions as denoting an object which is associated with shape, colour and parts, it does not denote these as parts of its meaning. The words merely indicate objects as they cannot express their essential nature (VP II §§434-436). So language on the one hand is fused with reality and on the other fails to provide its complete picture. In Bhartrhari language is like a lamp which merely reveals object and, unlike pictures, has its own limitation in its one to one relationship with reality.

Bhartrhari moves forward from what may be called limited picture theory and adapts, to a certain extent, 'use' and 'context' as determinant factors of meaning. For Bhartrhari a word does not denote at one and the same time every existent which can be named by it (VP II §68). For example, the sentence 'bring five apples' could be understood as a compound of five sentences: one apple as an object of each sentence. This shows that there may be difference in the forms of a sentence at the time of utterance and at the time of its comprehension. That is to say that the apparent verbal form is not the ultimate form of a sentence. Here lies the need to look for an alternate interpretation of meaning which is different from picture theory. The alternate interpretation is language-game through use theory of meaning.

For Bhartrhari the same word can convey a principal meaning, a secondary meaning and an incidental meaning (VP II §§301-307). So when a word is capable of expressing several meanings, the decision as to whether a particular meaning is primary or secondary depends on the context. So a word moves through a group of meanings although in a particular context a particular meaning reigns as primary. That is why Bhartrhari holds that the distinction must be drawn between possible and intended meaning, usual and contextually appropriate meaning, meaning that prompts the use of a word (*prayojaka artha*), secondary meaning (*upalakshna artha*) and primary meaning (*pradhana artha*).

As a word can convey different meanings, its form is not sufficient to express its meaning in a particular use. So the question is as to what are the determinant factors of the meaning of a word? For Bhartrhari the determinant factors are: syntactical connection of words in the sentence, situation/context, the meaning of other words in the sentence, propriety, place and time. Among these determinant factors Bhartrhari seems to emphasise on 'use' as well as 'context' (language-game): "A word withdraws from functioning when separated from that meaning linked to which it has been used" (VP II §160). Bhartrhari holds that the practice of grammar helps to create understanding of the meaning of words (VP II §§235a and b). So, meaning is understood from our repeated observation and usage.

One would be amazed to find Wittgenstein speaking in the following thoughts of Bhartrhari on Contextual meaning: "The meaning of a word depends on the words with which it is collocated syntactically by association or contrast. In the phrase 'Rama and Lakshmana' 'Rama' means the son of Dashratha; in 'Rama and Keshava', 'Rama'

means Balarama; and in 'Rama and Arjuna' Rama means Parashurama..." (Raja 1990: 174). Here Bhartrhari's thought that a word's meaning is decided in the context of its association with the meaning of other words, seems to be nothing but language-game theory.

Use of a word in a particular context includes speaker's intention as well. A sentence is uttered to express the speaker's intention and when it conveys some other meaning, that is called incidental meaning. The intention is regarded as the essential condition for a sentence to convey its meaning (VP II §§399-402). So, "When several meanings may be conveyed by one word and several words may convey one meaning, a word operates on that meaning towards which the speaker directs it" (VP II §402). For Bhartrhari, speaker's intention and meaning of an expression are causally connected with each other as the former is the cause of the latter.

It is pertinent for an intervention into Bhartrhari's analysis of intention to take into account his notion of 'language in mind' which for him is inexpressible. Bhartrhari distinguishes three layers of language, viz. *pashyanti*, *madhyama* and *vaikhari*. The first and second layers reside in the mind whereas the third layer is the spoken word. There is continuity between these three stages and language is an integral entity. Language in the mind is *sphota* (bursts forth), i.e. one through which meaning is manifested. It is defined as the linguistic potency which is indivisible, partless, sequenceless whole, and manifested by sound.

So, in Bhartrhari there are two aspects of language: internal which is inexpressible, i.e. language in the mind, and external, i.e. expressed language. The expressed language (*vaikhari*) refers on the one hand to language in the mind (*pashyanti* and *madhyama*) and on the other to the external object as meaning. It has been regarded that just as rubbing of the fire-sticks causes further fire likewise language in the mind of the speaker is cause of the audible language expressing it (VP I §46). The language in the mind is not connected with any object or state of affairs, but action. There is an identification between word-form and meaning (object)-form in it. The two aspects of the identification are indivisible in mind.

But the question arises: Is Bhartrhari's notion of language, as a composite reality of internal and external, present language as a private entity? The mental factor plays different roles in these thinkers as for Bhartrhari it plays a significant role in determination of meaning whereas Wittgenstein, although accepts the inexpressible realm which 'we must pass over in silence' (TLP 7), does not agree with this view point. It is the basic idea of Wittgenstein's "A Lecture on Ethics" that any attempt to describe the inexpressible is as futile as 'Running against the boundaries of language'.

This is to be understood in the context of Bhartrhari's concept of 'a flash of insight' (*pratibha*) which causes meaning of a sentence in the mind (VP II §143). It is an instinctive flash of intelligence which is described to be arising from nature, action, practice, meditation, invisible causes, and gift of the wise (VP II §§144-152). The flash of insight is not perception which reveals various things as meaning of words on the basis of picture theory.

It is seeing of world as a whole and therefore is indescribable. Unlike spoken language and empirical reality which gives rise to practical knowledge, it is not merely a piece of knowledge. It's a wisdom which leads to right conduct (*itikartyatata*). That is, it is 'not a body of doctrines but an activity' (TLP 4.112). For Wittgenstein mental processes or states do not constitute understanding of meaning of an expression. The understanding of meaning of an expression does not come through a flash of insight but through mastery of technique (PI §§197&199). Wittgenstein argues this with the example of understanding (learning) of playing-chess which does not consist in a flash of insight but in mastery of the rules of the game.

Wittgenstein's denial of the role of internal in deciding meaning can also be seen in his rejection of private language. Bhartrhari, while disagreeing with Wittgenstein on the nature and role of language in the mind, seems to be with Wittgenstein on the point that there is no private language. He says: "The burnt man understands burning in a certain way from his (direct) contact with fire; but the meaning 'burning' is conveyed by the word (burning) in a different way." (VP II §418). Here the 'different way' seems to explain that because there is no private language, the meaning of 'burning' is understood even by those who are not undergoing that particular sensation. The internal aspect of language is also public as it leads to right conduct. Actually, "There is also an agreement between Bhartrhari and Wittgenstein, that the meaning of the word even when it refers to a mental object has a public component" (Shah 2004:11). Moreover, 'clarification of thought' is the motto of both Bhartrhari ((VP II §484) and Wittgenstein (TLP 4.111). However, the conclusion that meaning is a public phenomenon does not interfere with Bhartrhari's thesis that language in the mind is inexpressible.

In brief, Bhartrhari and Wittgenstein both, in different ways, hold that the fusion between language and reality does not take place in the case of transcendental reality. The two levels of reality in Bhartrhari, i.e. secondary reality and present reality and Wittgenstein's sayable and showable resemble to a great extent with each other. The reason for this is that on the one hand 'sayable'/secondary reality is an umbrella concept for all psycho-physical realities and on the other 'present reality' and 'showable' are nomenclatures for the inexpressible realm. Like Wittgenstein's realm of sayable, Bhartrhari's empirical reality (*padartha*) stands for the meaning of words which is derived on the basis of one to one relationship, usage, and context among other things. And like Wittgenstein's showable, Bhartrhari's transcendental reality (*Shabdadvaita*) is beyond any expression. Moreover, both hold that meaning is public and not a private reality.

Some thinkers view it as very intriguing that Bhartrhari begins with a declaration that there is no world beyond language whereas concludes with a note of disharmony between the two and declares that reality transcends language (Bhate 1993: 67). However, there seems to be nothing intriguing if we interpret it from *Tractarian* perspective which shows that propositions cannot express that which is 'higher'(TLP 6.42) through the first premise that the world consists of facts which are expressible through language.

Literature

Abbr.

VP: *Vakyapadiya*

PI: *Philosophical Investigations*

TLP: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

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