CHAPTER 4

INDIAN THEORIES OF MEANING: A UNIQUE WORK IN LINGUISTICS
Meaning is the nucleus of communication, whether it is verbal or nonverbal. Analyzing the layers of meaning is also the understanding of the linguistic peculiarities of that language. Raja wrote a lot on Linguistics especially on Semantics—the branch of knowledge on meaning. The works of Raja like ITM, Mīmāṃsā Contribution to Language Studies and The Language of Poetry are discussing Indian views on meaning. Among them ITM is the most prominent and authentic work. The book examines Indian Semantic thoughts in a fresh perspective. ‘How do the various schools of thought view meaning, how do they satisfy the problems aroused by linguists’, the book investigates these questions and examines them elaborately.

Sanskrit and Linguistics

Indian culture is build up on the foundation of thoughts on language. The root of language studies of western scholars starts from Greek Literature. In the matter of Modern Linguistics, it emerged from the detailed study of Sanskrit lore. When the Western Scholars invented Sanskrit and began to learn it seriously, they realized the linguistic possibilities and peculiarities of Sanskrit. They also noticed the close relation of Sanskrit to Greek and Latin. This resulted in the
commencement of Comparative Philology, the earlier form of Linguistics. The celebrated speech of Sir William Johnes on the Third Annual Session of Asiatic Society, at Calcutta is considered as the commencement of Comparative philology.

The development of Linguistics was through the historical and comparative methodologies. It was Pāṇinian Sanskrit Grammar that guided the western linguists to analyze the linguistic peculiarities of languages like Greek and Latin. They endorse the structure of Pāṇini’s grammar as a good example of descriptive Linguistics.

To quote M.B.Emeneau ‘In linguistic matters the west has only been self-conscious about the canons of description for some decades now. Pāṇini’s description of Sanskrit on the other hand, is an exemplification of how linguistic description should follow scientific canons, and as a model of what should be attempted it has not yet been bettered except in the field of syntax.’ ¹ The well-known Linguist Bloomfield has revealed his indebtedness towards Astādhyāyi of Pāṇini. In fact the other Indian thinkers like Bhartṛhari, Yāska, Udbhata and Ānandavardhana are still source of inspiration for Modern Linguists.
In India until nineteenth century descriptive method only hold a distinct place in Language studies. Western scholars followed the historical and comparative approach. It was Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss scholar, who took the right attitude towards descriptive studies. In fact Saussure had acquaintance with Sanskrit Language before. In his well known book *Course De Linguistique* published in 1916, language study had been divided into synchronic (descriptive) and Diachronic (Historical). The significant / signifie relation advocated by Saussure represents the *śabda-artha* relation in Sanskrit.

*Indian Theories of Meaning – Its Publication*

In the year 1963 *ITM* was published by Adayar Library and Research Centre and the second edition came out in 1969. The second edition of the book was reprinted in 2000. Raja mentions the increased demand of the book in the preface of the reprint. ‘The reprint of the second edition of Indian Theories of Meaning is designed to meet the continuous demand from scholars of Sanskrit, Indian Philosophy, Literary Criticism, Stylistics and Hermeneutics in India and abroad.’ Even though hundreds of theses are being published, it is very rare that, such an acceptance and attraction of scholars has been obtained by *ITM*. 

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Content of *ITM*

In the book *ITM* Raja presents Indian doctrines of meaning manifested in the whole Indian systems of knowledge in the light of Modern Linguistics. Raja states in his work that ‘An attempt is made in the following pages to give a brief survey of the various theories of meaning held by the different schools of Indian thought and to bring out their significance in Modern linguistic discussions.’

The Chapters of the *ITM* are as under:

1. Introduction: The Meaning of ‘Meaning’
2. *Abhidhā* – The Primary Meaning of the Word
4. Conditions of Knowing the Meaning of a Sentence
5. The Comprehension of the Meaning of a Sentence: *Anvitābhidhāna* and *Abhihitānvaya*
6. *Lakṣaṇā* or Metaphor
7. *Vyañjanā* or Suggestion

In this thesis Raja examines various topics of Indian philosophy, grammar and literature. The three *vyāpāras* of meaning like *abhidhā* *lakṣaṇā* and *vyañjanā* and their divisions are taken for detailed discussion. The theory of the *sphoṭa* presents as the theory of Linguistic symbols. The philosophic observations of Bharṭṛhari have a
decisive space in this work. ākāṅkṣā, yogyatā, saṇṇidhi - the three conditions of knowing the meaning of a sentence is also subjected to a thorough discussion. The process of śābdabōdha or the comprehension of the meaning of a sentence is a prominent area in Indian linguistic philosophy. The theories of anvitābhidhāna and abhīhitānvaya are also discussed in it. The dhvani theory and its various elements have been examined in the chapter titled vyañjanā or suggestion. Here five main features like – sphoṭa, anvitābhidhāna and abhīhitānvaya, abhidhā, metaphor and suggestion are taken for analysis.

**Sphoṭa Theory**

Raja presents sphoṭa, the theory of Bharṭṛhari as one of the prominent theories of Indian linguistic philosophy. Bharṭṛhari, one of the distinguished Linguistic Philosophers of India is the advocate of sphoṭa theory. He also put forward the theory of ‘śābdabōdha. The two works of Bharṭṛhari are Vākyapadīya and the uncompleted commentary of Mahābhāṣya. A short commentary of Vākyapadīya is also believed to be written by him. Raja notes that the work ‘Sabda-dhātuparīkṣa is ascribed to Bharṭṛhari.” The three works known as Śṛṅgāraśatakam, Vairāgyaśatakam and Nītiśatakam are ascribed to Bharṭṛhari.
Vākyapadīya of Bhartṛhari presents the detailed discussion on sphoṭa theory. But earlier grammatical and philosophical works also throw light to the ideas that form the basis of this theory.

Sphoṭa represents the linguistic sign or symbol of Modern Linguistics. To quote Raja ‘It maintains that a word or a sentence is to be considered not as a concatenation make up of different sound units arranged in a particular order, but mainly as a single meaningful symbol. The word or the sentence thus considered as a single meaningful symbol is called the sphoṭa. The articulated sounds used in linguistic discourse are merely the means by which the symbol is revealed; it is this symbol which is the meaning bearer. It may also be called the work or the sentence considered from the semantic aspect. It is indivisible and has no time-order; the articulated sounds with the time-order are resorted to only as a means of revealing this symbol.’

Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita and Nāgeśabhaṭṭa list eight divisions of the sphoṭa. Here the meaningfulness (vācakatva) is the basic essential.

Anvitābhidhāna Theory and Abhihitānvaya Theory

Comparing anvitābhidhāna theory and abhihitānvaya Theory, Raja states that the theory of anvitābhidhāna is very acceptable in the viewpoint of Modern Linguistics. Raja explains this ‘The meaning of a
sentence is made up of the individual word-meanings and their mutual relation. According to the *anvitābhidhāna* theory, both the individual word-meanings and their mutual relation are conveyed by the words themselves; but according to the *abhihitānvaya* theory the word convey only the individual word meaning; the mutual relation is conveyed by the word meanings, and not by the words. Among modern writers on linguistics, Wundt seems to represent the *anvitābhidhāna* theory; for he says that ‘in determining the nature of a sentence, no addition to what is expressed by the words should be assumed.’ Polemizing against this view, Paul maintains the *abhihitānvaya* view that such an assumption is usually necessary. The common place statement in modern linguistics that the sentence is the unit of speech is comparable to the *anvitābhidhāna* theory.⁶

Bhāṭṭa school of *mīmāṃsakas* and some of the Naiyāyikas advocates *abhihitānvaya* Theory. According to them the meaning of sentence is a concatenation of the individual items expressed by the words. The individual words bear their own meaning. But it can be comprehended separately. The comprehension of a sentence is carried out in such a way that on hearing of a sentence, firstly we get the separate meanings of the words, one after the other. Secondly the
meaning of the sentence is comprehended according to the three factors ākāṅkṣā, yogyatā and saṃnidhi.

Raja illustrates ‘When we here a sentence, we have first an understanding of the separate meanings of the words one after another; then these word meaning are related on the basis of ākāṅkṣā (expectancy) yogyatā (consistency) and saṃnidhi (proximity), and we arrive at the unified meaning of the sentence as a whole. The expression of the individual word-meaning precedes the knowledge of the logical connection among them. The different isolated ideas expressed successively by the words are put together by the collective memory of the listener (samūhālambana-smṛti). The individual word meanings are remembered separately until all the words are heard; then there is a simultaneous cognition of the sentence-meaning in which all the word meanings are properly related to one another, on the basis of ākāṅkṣā, yogyatā and saṃnidhi. According to the abhihitānvaya theory, on the other hand, each word, as it is being uttered, contributes to the meaning of the sentence which is revealed step by step, becoming clearer and clearer with the utterance of subsequent words.’

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The discussion of *abhihitānvaya* and *anvitābhidhāna* theories almost concludes by presenting the perspective of Mukulabhaṭṭa the author of *Abhidhāvṛttimāṭrka*. According to him both theories contain partial truth. In the viewpoint of words *abhihitānvaya* theory is more correct. On the contrary, if looked at from the viewpoint of sentence, *anvitābhidhāna* theory is more preferable. Mukulabhaṭṭa accepts a combination of two views and calls it the theory of *samuccaya*.8

**Abhidhā**

*Abhidhā* is the first among the four-fold system of Indian theories of meaning. The primary meaning of a word is significant that it becomes the foundation of other systems of meaning like *lakṣaṇā* and *vyañjanā*. In *ITM* the discussion on variant aspect of primary meaning of word is given. At first, Raja discusses the *śābdabodha* theory, the well known method used for learning the relation between words and object meant by them are mentioned. Contextual factors like *artha*, *prakaraṇa* and classification of words *yaugika*, *rūḍha*, *yogārūḍha* and *yaugikārūḍha* have been elaborately discussed here.

**Metaphor**

Metaphor is almost known to all world languages. In Sanskrit it corresponds to *lakṣaṇā* in general sense. Raja provides a big portion
on it in his masterpiece work *ITM*. Raja analyses all the features of *lakṣaṇā* and stresses the motive element in it which is unfamiliar to other disciplines of theory except Poetics. Here summarises Raja’s views on *lakṣaṇā* and exemplify some of the significant observations.

Following features are thoroughly examined by the author. Definition of metaphor, conditions for a metaphor, the normal and the actual meanings in a transfer, *gauṇī vṛtti* or qualitative transfer, *jahallakṣaṇā*, *ajahallakṣaṇā*, *jahadajahallakṣaṇā*, *śuddhā*, *sāropā* and *sādhyavasāna*, classification of *lakṣaṇā*, incompatibility of the primary sense, *nirūḍhalakṣaṇā* or faded metaphor, motive element in *lakṣaṇā*, compound words, and Bhartṛhari’s views on *lakṣaṇā*.

Raja introduces metaphor as secondary significative function of words. It is interesting to note how he defines this: To quote “If we take the word as denoting its normal primary meaning, the sentence may become nonsensical in the context. This produces a ‘psychic resistance’ in the listener, and there is a sort of break in the flow. It excites attention and requires interpretation for understanding the purport. The actual referent of the word has to be taken as different from its normal one, but in some way connected with it, either through similarity or through some other relation. This function of the word,
denoting a referent different from its normal and primary one, but somehow related to it, is called lakṣaṇā or upacāra; other terms like gauṇī vṛtti and bhakti are also used to refer to this secondary significative function of words. ⁹

Of the three essential conditions, in lakṣaṇā the third one – Sanction for the transferred sense by popular usage, or a definite motive justifying the transfer is not accepted by all philosophers. The first one is the inapplicability or the unsuitability of the primary meaning in the context. The second one, some relation between the primary and the actual referent of the word. The last but not least is the sanction for the transferred sense by popular usage, or a definite motive justifying the transfer. Raja observes that other disciplines of thought are not considered the motive element in lakṣaṇā. But rhetoricians paid great attention on it because they accept vyañjanā, the third function of words. Raja opines that motive element in metaphorical expression is not clear and dependent to contextual factors. Here in the case of the well known example gaṅgāyāṃ ghōśah, it is the motive element, the village has the qualities of sanctity and coolness associated with the sacred river.
Suggestion

Suggestion or vyañjanā is the backbone of the dhvani theory. It is common that most of the art lovers approved and appraised the theory of dhvani. Ānandavardhana the founder of dhvani theory was himself a sahartdaya. He wrote Dhvanyāloka focusing the perspective of sahartdaya. Another name of Dhvanyāloka is sahartdayāloka. Thus the title itself emphasizes the importance of sahartdaya.

Primarily Raja was a sahartdaya. His writings and their titles are evidence for the same. Even while examining the language he usually discusses on the language of poetry. In ITM also some may think that he is committed for establishing the theory of suggestion. Unlike Mīmāmsā, Vyākaraṇa and Nyāya the theories of poetics are considered of lesser importance, even in the perspective of Indian scholars. Here Raja supports its validity and acceptance in language behavior also.

Raja explains that Ānandavardhana got the spark of dhvani from the well-known linguistic philosopher Bhartṛhari, who laid the foundation of dhvani. Bhartṛhari has already discussed the contradictory nature of the utterance and its meaning.
The context is a decisive factor in the comprehension of the meaning of a sentence. Raja also points out that Ānandavardhana focused on literary meanings. Actually it is a limitation. But in the case of Poetics, it was a great impetus. Ānandavardhana developed it in such a way that it covers almost all doctrines of literature, till then.

First of all Ānandavardhana established the existence of the third meaning which is quiet distant from the primary and secondary meanings. Raja stresses on the necessity of another realm of meaning as a medium of manifesting the whole emotional world of humanity. Poetry/literature utilizes all the possibilities of a language.

To quote Raja ‘It is a matter of common experience that an utterance may mean much more than its literal sense. The naiyāyika-s and mīmāṃsaka-s are interested more in accuracy and precision in the use of words which they want to analyze objectively than in the fullness of expression and in the possibilities of extending the range of meaning to the domain of the inexpressible, are satisfied with the normal literal sense. But the poets and the critics who deal with the totality of human experience cannot neglect vast portions of language behavior’. While describing the existence of the ‘another meaning’ or further meaning Raja presents it as a socio-cultural meaning.
He also points out that ‘...under the term ‘meaning’ is included not only the information conveyed, but also the emotion induced; this naturally necessitates the assumption of suggestive power for language.’

Vyañjanā and Dhvani

It is interesting to note how Raja differentiates the theory of vyañjanā and the theory of dhvani. Ānandavardhana is concerned only with poetic language, and therefore, omits many of these elements of speech from his field of observation. He is concerned only with the suggestion of element that is of aesthetic value. Though Vyañjanā, in the broadest sense of the term, embraces all such elements, it is only in its restricted sense as applied to poetry that Ānandavardhana studies the problem. His aim is to establish the doctrine of dhvani which is vyañjanā, applied to poetry.

ITM provides a major discussion on Indian semantic theories in the viewpoint of modern Linguistics. For this, he proficiently makes use of all grammatical philosophical and literary traditions of India. Moreover the detailed bibliography given at the end of the book will definitely do a great help for the research scholar, who is interested in further studies in Semantics.
Notes

2. K.Kunjunni Raja, Preface to *ITM*, p.V.
   Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Bhasha Institute. p.28