CHAPTER - I

LANGUAGE AND PHILOSOPHY
Man is considered to be the most superior of all living beings that inhabit this planet. In some quarters, it is believed that man and other living beings have been evolving from a common parental stock and the former has by-passed the latter in course of evolution. All human achievements and all that passes by the name of human excellence have been attributed to two fundamental peculiarities in them i.e., the capacity to use language and the capacity to make tools. Man unlike most other animate beings is gregarious in nature, and this basic tendency to live in groups and form society calls for a medium by which one could establish communication with others.

Though the primitive man, in the absence of a language might be communicating through gestures and postures, the evolution of language marks a fundamental departure in the evolution of human culture and civilization. Language is a set of conventional symbols, written or spoken that signify certain ideas or feelings. Though the reality, the ideas, and the experiences might be the same, they could be expressed through different languages as there could be different conventional signs to denote the same object and signify the same idea. Hence there is an obvious difference between ideas and feelings on
the one hand, forms of linguistic expressions on the other. The form consists of sets of symbols or words combined by certain syntactical rules and the content consists of the ideas or the concepts. To think is to have ideas or to conceptualize. It would appear that it is one thing to have experiences or ideas and quite another to communicate them through symbols. In other words, in order to make our experiences public that is to communicate them - one has to employ certain symbols in the accepted framework of conventional rules.

Philosophers down the ages have devoted themselves to the study of reality as a whole. They have addressed themselves to the most fundamental questions pertaining to man and reality in general. Unlike a layman or a scientist, philosophers have addressed themselves to the most general questions like what is ultimately real? What is matter? What is mind? etc. The peculiarity of these questions is that they are non-factual and of a most general kind. For when a philosopher seeks to answer the question "what is matter?", he is hardly interested in the analysis of particular pieces of material objects (in which of course a physicist might be interested), rather he is interested in knowing what matter
is as such. In other words, the philosopher is wedded to the task of drawing the logical geography of the concept of matter; which again consists in analysing the concept of matter, defining, finding its relation with other neighbouring concepts and thereby removing the ambiguity pertaining to the concept. This is how philosophers have thrown light on conceptual issues. Here it is significant to point out that a philosophical study of matter does not involve the study of the word 'matter' but the concept of "matter." The idea, or the concept of matter becomes meaningful only when it is related to a corresponding linguistic symbol, that is, the expression 'matter.' Hence the analysis of the concept of matter necessarily involves the use of language. Thus the conceptual analysis boils down to the analysis of the expressions that signify the concept. Of course, a philosopher is not interested in language as a linguist or a grammarian is interested in. Linguists study language as a set of data. They study language from the point of view of syntax, semantics and phonology. The syntactical rules of language concern the principles that permit a given combination of words or symbols to be meaningful and enables a speaker to generate a new set of expressions. This makes language creative and elastic. In semantics,
on the other hand, one studies the meaning components and the factors that have a bearing on them. Speaking involves articulation of sounds and in phonetics, one studies the genesis, and nature of proper articulation. This clearly goes to show that a linguist is concerned with matters of fact. But the philosopher studies words and expressions to the extent they signify concepts and ideas. Hence the philosopher's concern with language is indirect. Of course in analysis of the concepts, the philosopher has to take cognizance of the semantical and the syntactical rules governing language.

Thus philosophical activity, in short, consists in the conceptual investigation of reality as a whole. But any and every concept is not of philosophical importance. For example, there is hardly any philosophical speculation as to the concept of hair, dirt etc. It is only certain fundamental, basic and most general concepts that baffle human intelligence that philosophers are interested in. For example, the "problem of universals" or class essences was discussed by Plato and Aristotle in the past, and the contemporary philosophers also debate about issues pertaining to the concept of universal, with equal freshness. In natural science, we find
that one theory becomes obsolete with the emergence of another on the strength of the adequacy with which they explain facts. But in philosophy problems never become outdated. The Wittgensteinian treatment of the problem of meaning is obviously an improvement on earlier theories. The theory of family resemblances, which is part of this theory, throws light not only in problems of meaning, but opens up different ways of looking at philosophical problems as such. But it is usually not believed nor would it be justified to believe, that this provides the final answers to problems. Different philosophical theories throw light on philosophical issues from different perspectives and that is how philosophy grows.

This conceptual investigation of reality has taken various dimensions. Philosophers have propounded different metaphysical systems in their attempt to study reality. Sometimes, a philosopher, like Locke, insists upon investigation into the instruments, source, nature and extent of human knowledge. Thus the investigation becomes epistemic in nature.

Seventeenth century metaphysicians like Descartes, Spinoza and Leibnitz were bent upon rebuilding philosophy, after the deductive method in geometry, with the hope that
philosophical conclusions will be as definite as those of geometry. Accordingly, they started with some a priori assumptions and went on deducing conclusions and claiming these conclusions to be true of reality.

Again, philosophers may be interested in enumerating the rules that guide human thinking and the conditions that make discourse meaningful, whether it is in metaphysics, epistemology or logic. Invariably, a philosopher has clarity as his goal and analysis as the method. But a perusal of the history of philosophy would reveal that philosophers in their metaphysical flights have produced a host of paradoxes. Instead of bringing clarity to the concepts, they have made the issues more obscure. For example, Bradley, a pioneer of the idealistic movement, pronounced matter and time to be unreal - a conclusion which very much aroused the logical positivists and logical analysts into action. As the contemporary philosophers remark, in the name of philosophy they have harvested pseudo philosophies. The idealistic conclusions of Bradley not only appeared as absurd but also came as a shock to philosophers like Moore, Russell and the logical positivists. Moore sought to refute idealism in the interest of common sense and Russell in the interest of science.
Logical positivism started with the promised objective of proving the futility of metaphysical propositions and they sought to do so by taking verifiability as a criterion of meaning and since metaphysical propositions are shown to be non-verifiable either in practice or in principle, they were proved to be meaningless and devoid of significance. But logical positivism, because of its narrow conception of meaning, was almost a passing phase in the history of philosophy, though Prof. A.J. Ayer tried to sustain the positivistic spirit by reformulating the criterion of meaning.

Both Russell and Moore, the co-founders of the analytical movement, agree that the idealistic speculations spring from certain confusions about language and meaning. Russell maintains that the philosophical confusions can be eliminated if they are recast in the language consisting of symbols that are well defined in terms of the sensuous particulars. Both Russell as well as early Wittgenstein plead for the ideal language as the solution to philosophical problems. Russell would argue that by an analysis in terms of ideal language, the logical structure of a particular expression can be discovered, and consequently, the confusions arising out of the form (grammatical form) of the language will cease
to be there. Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* also takes the language of science as his ideal and arrives at an atomistic view about the universe from certain considerations of language and meaning. Language gets meaning only by picturing facts. Since whatever can be said can be said clearly, descriptive language becomes the only meaningful language. Both Russell and Wittgenstein arrived at a pluralistic world view as a result of their analysis of language and meaning. Hence the view goes in the name of logical atomism. Moore, on the other hand, becomes critical of the idealistic conclusions for they militate against the common sense truths. Common sense truths being self evident and indisputable, he recommended that the validity of the philosophical systems are to be tested to the extent they conform to common sense truths. But while viewing the idealistic speculations Moore was against the age-old tradition of thinking philosophy to be synthetic. For, according to him, philosophical problems disappear only when they are analysed into different constituent aspects. Philosophy does not give us knowledge of new facts but provides illumination or clarity of basic concepts. The philosopher's goal being clarity, he must employ language which is clear,
distinct and does not generate further confusions. Ordinary language, for Moore, is sacrosanct. The words and expressions are distinctively clear, and have withstood the test of time through constant use. The metaphysicians run into muddles for they do not keep themselves alive to the ways in which the expressions are actually used and ascribe new meanings to them. In this respect there appears to be striking similarity between Moore and the later Wittgenstein. This might give the suggestion that Wittgenstein is anti-metaphysician. But we will argue out in subsequent chapters that there are idealistic streaks in his writings.

The later Wittgenstein's view in *Philosophical Investigations* brought about an epoch making revolution in the history of philosophy. It marks a turning point in the very mode of philosophical thinking. The views of Wittgenstein were no doubt novel and radical and a challenge to the traditional way of philosophizing. Certain philosophical paradoxes, according to Wittgenstein, are consequent upon certain confusions over the use of certain concepts. And they are linguistic in nature. These philosophical oddities arise because some philosophers take the concepts beyond their natural context and treat
them in abstraction. Ordinary language, according to Wittgenstein, is, as it were, the home of terms and expressions. A term becomes meaningful only in certain contextual configurations. When they are treated in abstraction, philosophical confusions ensue and he urges that these confusions could be removed by bringing back expressions from their philosophical to their home use. According to Wittgenstein, certain types of philosophical problems can be answered by showing that they are no problems, rather pseudo problems and these questions can be answered by showing that they are not genuine questions in spite of their grammatical form appearing to be so. And he develops his doctrine of language game to reinterpret and solve the age old philosophical enigma. Thus it can be summed up that language in general and concepts in particular are the subject matter of philosophy. The philosopher does not raise particular questions about specific languages, their grammatical, formation and transformation rules. Rather he raises very very general and broad questions about language. He raises such questions as, what is language? How is language related to reality? What is meaning? etc. In other words it can be said that the philosopher studies not particular languages but speech. Language is used for the purposes of speech and the philosopher studies speech activities.