CHAPTER - III

LANGUAGE GAME AND FORMS OF LIFE
It has been rightly remarked that "to be deprived of speech is to lack the indispensible prerequisite for human community." Man is perhaps the only animal who articulates his thoughts and experiences by use of symbols namely words, pictures, graphs, numbers etc. He is surrounded by the social as well as the natural environment. So almost all his experiences are generated by a series of interactions between the individuals and the surroundings.

If we go back in time, we might find the primitive man roaming about in search of food and communicating his feelings and experiences through gestures and postures. The necessity to communicate and share one's feeling arises only in a society consisting of many members. Practical exigencies might have led men to live in groups. As group living becomes more and more compact and well knit, there arises the inevitibility of a medium through which one could communicate with another. Articulation through gestures, through picture drawings, through symbols, marks the different stages leading to the emergence of language in its full fledged form. It may be noted that language has not been invented by any individual at any specific point of time as it is the case with many other inventions. It rather grew out of the necessities of human existence as inevitably and as spontaneously as it could be.
It is rightly observed by Chomsky that it is man and man alone who has innate linguistic capacities. The invention of script added a new dimension to the use of language as it enabled him to communicate to posterity even in his absence. That is how knowledge becomes cumulative bequeathed from one generation to another so that the latter works with the knowledge of the former. Thus language in its spoken and written form has gone a long way in promoting the cause of man himself, or, rather in the making of man qua man.

Many thinkers about language tend to believe that the primary aim or use of language is to communicate the speaker's or the writer's thought. Language, like many other human activities, is purposive.

"A man may speak in order to impart information, to deceive his hearer, to show friendliness, to ease social tension, to relieve his feelings, to show sympathy or some other attitude - and so on, indefinitely. Yet there might, after all, be some principle underlying this superficial variety of actual purposes served. We may remind ourselves of the many ways in which even a relatively simple instrument, such as a hammer can be used as a door stop, a paperweight, a weapon, or in the sport of hurling the hammer. In spite of this variety of uses, there is a simple answer to the question, what is a hammer used for? Its standard or normal use is simply to hit things; and all the other uses mentioned are incidental to that single primary purpose that the tool that was designed to serve."

Language is wedded to experience. Knowledge in its ordinary sense is possible when there is an effective relationship between the perceiver and the object of perception. The sense object contact (in case of external perception) or mind's contact with the inner feelings gives rise to certain ideas, notions, feelings, experiences in the observer. These ideas and experiences are personal and private to the extent that only the observer, has access to his own feelings and ideas. It can be made public by correlating it with certain symbols spoken or written. These statements are meant to be taken at a non-controversial level - a level at which they would appear to be rather obviously true. The phonemes constitute the minimal sound unit of language and morpheme the minimal meaning unit. The word which consists of one or more than one syllable is made to stand for a thing or an event or a person or a function. In other words except words like "the," "of," "and," "or" etc. i.e., the prepositions and the connectives, almost all words derive their meaning only in relation to the things they denote or the situation they signify. They derive their significance and sense from the situations around. But to make communication possible and smooth in a group or society consisting of a number of individuals, certain amount of uniformity in the form of
linguistic conventions is essential. The linguistic conventions signify a set of rules pertaining to the use of language so that the speech activity becomes intelligible to the speaker of the language, the hearer and the interpreter.

"The speech-art is directed, reversible, and self-regulating. Speech is a social activity: it requires, in Samuel Butler's phrase, a 'sayer' and a 'sayee'. (All speech begins in dialogue, though it easily declines into monologue.) In this, it resembles, other social acts of cooperation or interplay, such as fighting, playing games, or making love. It differs from some such social acts, however, in being directed to a particular receiver. More important is the fact that the rules of speaker and hearer are interchangeable: we know what it would be like to be receiving the very same message that we send. Furthermore, we hear ourselves speak, while we speak are constantly subject to 'feedback.'" 2

The existence of various languages point to the existence of distinct linguistic conventions with their respective rules and patterns. These rules not only prescribe the ways of meaningful combinations of words and expressions but the ways in which certain linguistic expressions are to be related to experience which they seek to describe or represent. In other words learning a language consists in mastering these syntactical rules.

2. Ibid, p.80.
by which one could produce any number of grammatically meaningful structures but also the semantic rules which consist in correlating the linguistic expressions with certain extra linguistic conditions. Language is intimately wedded to experience. Of course the purpose of language as Max Black puts it -

"The purpose of language in point is not to evoke reality, as perhaps representational painting hopes to do, but to say true things about it. And to accomplish this, it is essential that the representations should be distinct from the thing represented. Language cannot be saddled with the absurd task of reduplicating reality."3

Nonetheless the fact remains that language in order to be meaningful must have some uniform relationship with certain objective conditions. Mere articulation of grammatically correct expressions will not make a statement meaningful. If I say for example - "it is shocking" and be in a state of ease then my hearers will not understand me. For to be shocked implies being in a state of discomfort and depression. Since the conditions are missing I cannot be said to have used the expression meaningfully. So over and above the syntactical conditions the semantic conditions must be satisfied in order that the expression is meaningfully employed. The use of a language necessi-

3. Ibid., p. 164.
tates correlating the verbal expressions with certain mode of life that is non-linguistic in nature.

Life in a broad sense connotes functions that the living organisms perform from their birth to death. Birth, growth, decay, leading to final extinction are the necessary stages in the life of an animate being. The mode or the form of life of an animal centres round its instinctive necessities. Some linguists and animal psychologists in their attempt to study animal behaviour have noticed certain sound patterns among some birds and animals. Frogs produce certain uniform sounds in their mating seasons. Similarly birds also produce certain uniform sounds at the sight of the death of one of their species. Thus certain amount of regularity or corelation can be found among the sounds and certain events in the animal life. But linguists are constrained to say that animals do not have language. For language in the proper sense of the term connotes something more. Language is a growing and dynamic phenomenon intimately wedded to the various facets of life.

There are two distinct ways in which the language of human beings can be distinguished from the sound patterns of animals and birds. Human language which consists
of words are subject to the intricate rules for composition. "It permits a competent speaker to liberate himself from the 'tyranny of the immediate present' - to say what has never been said before, to record what no longer exists, and to imagine what may never happen. It is the indispensable condition for history, science, and imaginative literature. No difference between man and beast is more important than syntax."  

But in case of the mating call of frogs, the sound so produced are conditioned by certain biological state and certain environmental situations. Moreover the language of human beings is purposive. Language has as many functions as there are human interests and purposes. It is designed to express thoughts, wishes, attitudes, and feelings of the speaker. It is employed to bless and curse, to request and admonish, to describe and inform. It is a purposeful activity backed by ones deliberation whereas in case of animals it is more instinctive than deliberate. Language is invariably related to one situation or another so much so that given an expression one can imagine what kind of situation it invokes and given a form of life one can imagine what is the

4. Ibid., p.82
form of language — that would represent it. In other words given one, the other could be read off. Since human beings have varied interests they are said to have different modes of life. Since fact stating is only one of the purposes, one should not limit the function of language to its fact stating job only.

To illustrate the nature and function of language with more perspicuity Wittgenstein takes the analogy of "game" and coins the expression "language game." The expression language game is highly indicative of the close affinity between the activities "playing a game" and "using a language." There are various games with their respective rules and mode of performance. The rules of one game obviously are irrelevant in playing another. For example — rules of chess and the rules of playing badminton are not followed while playing cards. Games with their distinct mode of performance also serve various purposes. A game like football may involve physical exertion on the part of the participants whereas in playing chess what is called for is the exercise of one's mind and intelligence. Over and above the rules regulating a game and the purpose it serves, playing a game also involves a sense of participation on the part of the players who play it. Normally
to participate in a game is to commit oneself to a certain framework of rules and therefore to bind one's movement or activities to certain specific and predictable behavior. Therefore given the name of a game one can very well presume the sort of performance that the participants are going to engage themselves in and given the performance one can know about the type of game that is being played. But in case of a child who plays ball by himself, he does not follow any accepted or well defined set of rules. But from the fact that the child plays throwing the ball at random one can very well presume that the child is playing with amusement. The child's game is no doubt a game with its peculiar mode of activities. The child obviously does not behave in the way that an adult might; the game of the child is distinctly childlike. So an onlooker while watching the child's play does not normally expect what he would expect in case of an adult. This clearly shows that the child has a distinct mode of participation. Hence to play the game is to participate in a mode of life. Even though from the point of view of rules there is nothing common and essential to all games what is common to one and all is that playing a game involves a characteristic mode of
participation. A particular game is intimately wedded to
certain mode of participation.

Wittgenstein most befittingly compares **using a**
language with playing a game. In *Philosophical Investiga-
tions*, Wittgenstein explains at length as to how by language
we discharge various functions. He would call them activi-
ties. 'Stating facts, though a primary, is not the sole
function of language. By language we command, we request
we pray, we curse, and we do several other things. Language
is employed in making scientific investigation and for
writing poetry. While employing language for a particular
purpose in particular area or universe of discourse one
consciously or unconsciously abides by certain rules. For
example - In a scientific universe of discourse the words
and expressions are used with maximum precision and are
descriptive of facts and phenomena. Hence the purpose here
is to acquaint the reader or the hearer with certain phe-
nomena or events. But when a poet composes a poem he is
hardly interested in describing anything objectively. His
purpose is rather to evoke emotions in the hearer or the
reader or just to express them. For example - Wordsworth's
lines -

"My heart leaps up when I

behold a rainbow in the sky."
does not purport to describe anything about the rainbow or his heart. But rather to communicate a deep sense of exhilaration at the picturesque beauty of the rainbow. And while going through the lines a sensitive reader is likely to imagine or experience similar intensity of emotions. But one may ask how can a heart jump? How can a heart leap? Is it noticeable in the graph of electrocardiogram? It does not make literal sense to say that the heart jumps at the sight of the rainbow. To say so is clearly to misunderstand the very nature and logic of poetic language. The rules, the criterion of understanding and intelligibility true of scientific language is obviously inapplicable or rather irrelevant to the understanding and interpretation of a piece of poetic creation. The attempt to understand the poetic description in the model of science is as good as playing one game with the rules of another. As it is also possible for one man to play different games with their respective rules and mode of participation, it is possible for one to make various uses of language, that is to play different language games. But while using the language for a specific purpose one is to conform to the rules of its employment. So learning a language would imply to master certain skills as to the use of it.
What is still more significant is that using a language does not merely call for the ability to combine words into grammatically meaningful compounds but to use them only when certain specific conditions that are non-linguistic or non-verbal in nature are fulfilled. These non-linguistic conditions are said to be semantic for they are the totality of the conditions that impart meaning to the expression. Negatively speaking, an expression otherwise grammatically sound may not be intelligible at all if divorced from the requisite semantic conditions or the content which renders it intelligible. An expression significant in one context or universe of discourse or language game (to use Wittgenstein's terminology) may not be significant in another. For example - the concept of truth is quite meaningful in the scientific language game, may not be relevant in that of ethics. Similarly the normative or evaluative expressions like good and bad may not be relevant or appropriate in description of facts. And the same expression may have different meanings in different language games. The term "truth" is used as synonymous with reality; for a moralist who exhorts "speak the truth," truth is obviously the property of judgement. And for a spiritual aspirant
it signifies the highest state of being i.e., the 'Absolute.' So to determine the meaning of an expression is to understand it in the context of its use.

Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* and in the *Blue and Brown Books* time and again lays emphasis on the fact that the language that we speak is thus intimately wedded to life situations. The words and expressions derive their meaning and significance from situations or circumstances. So learning a language would consist not only in mastering the linguistic conventions that render certain combination of words meaningful but also learning as to how they are correlated to certain extra-linguistic phenomena. In other words, the knowledge of the meaning of words and the syntactical rules will not amount to using the language. Wittgenstein remarks in *Philosophical Investigations*:

"If a lion could talk we could not understand him." \(^5\)

It is not because the forms of words uttered by the animal are unintelligible but it is because the surrounding circumstances or the forms of life connected to it

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are missing. We could not understand it even if he could utter grammatically correct sentences. Because his behaviour would be radically different from ours. For example—

If a lion says "Goodness it is three o'clock I must hurry to make appointment, but that he continues to lie there, yawning, making no effort to move" and we cannot say that the lion has asserted or stated something. One could not make out what he had asserted for the modes of behaviour into which words are woven are too radically different from our own. We would not understand him since he does not share the relevant forms of life with us.

Thus one can make a distinction between speaking a language and using it. Speaking a language in a very narrow sense may mean articulating certain sound patterns. In this sense an animal or a bird can be said to speak a language in the sense that they can be trained to produce certain grammatically meaningful expression. But using a language would require an ability of skill to relate expressions to certain modes of behaviour. The remark "it is 3 o'clock I am in a hurry for the appointment" should ordinarily be accompanied by a kind of briskness and restlessness in the behaviour of the utterer and be followed by necessary preparations to hurry for

the appointment. Communication is a bipolar process as it normally presupposes a speaker and a hearer. As using a language implies the ability to correlate the linguistic phenomenon with the accompanying modes of behaviour, the understanding of the language or expression would similarly imply man's skill in discovering the correlation between language and the form of life from where the former gets its meaning. In Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein is not so much concerned with the question about the meaning of words and sentences or predicate expressions but with the problem about the use of expressions in a great variety of speech situations.

In the Brown Book the idea of language game is correlated with the idea of certain conditions or occasions or the role in which language is played in the whole life. To understand and translate the language spoken by a unknown tribe would require an observation of various non-verbal behaviour that is action, facial expression etc., and co-relating them with verbal expressions.

"Whether a word of the language of our tribe is rightly translated into a word of the English language depends upon the role this word plays in the whole life of the tribe; the occasions on which it is used, the expressions of emotion by which it is generally accompanied, the ideas which it generally awakens or which prompts its
saying, etc., etc. As an exercise ask yourself: in which cases would you say that a certain word uttered by the people of the tribe was a greeting? In which cases should we say it corresponded to our "Good bye", in which to our "Hello"? In which cases would you say that a word of a foreign language corresponded to our "perhaps"? - to our expressions of doubt, trust, certainty? You will find that the justifications for calling something an expression of doubt, conviction, etc., largely, though of course not wholly, consist in descriptions of gestures, the play of facial expressions, and even the tone of voice."7

Thus understanding a concept requires observing the occasion of its use. In Philosophical Investigations Wittgenstein remarks -

"To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life."8

All these go to suggest that the words and expressions in language do not have any meaning in isolation. To understand a language one has to look at how the language is used and relate the forms of words with the "forms of life." The co-relation may be direct or remote. To elucidate this Wittgenstein draws a distinction between pure language game and impure language game. Pure language game would consist in using certain expressions in

abstraction. For example, one can go on lecturing and discussing about 'pen' at length, without obvious reference to actual situations: such a theoretical discussion may be quite meaningful to the speaker and the hearer. But Wittgenstein would point out that the understanding of the expression 'pen' and many other related expressions in the pure language game would presuppose that both the hearer and the speaker have mastered the meaning of these expressions in the impure language game, by co-relating them with their objective counterparts. In other words, the uses of words in impure language game are basic "in the sense that if a person did not know how to play the impure games, he could not play the pure ones either."

"Philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday."

"The confusions which occupy us arise when language is like an engine idling, not when it is doing work."

Wittgenstein substantiates his view by referring to an example in Augustine's *Confessions*. This is with regard to the notion of "time." There is hardly any confusions as to the use of temporal expressions in common parlance. But when the philosopher asks "what is time?" it poses a problem. This question is raised here in abstraction, and the normal tendency is to treat it on the pattern of some analogies. This leads to the formation of certain pictures that hold us captive. In this case the word 'time' may be conceived after the analogy of a stream, flowing from the past to the future through the present and the obvious philosophical attempt would be directed to discover the nature of this quasi physical stream. Here 'time' is considered to be a substance for it being a noun is understood to be signifying some substance. Wittgenstein would observe that, in spite of the grammatical form of the expression it may not necessarily be expressive of its function in language game and sometimes it is positively misleading. Therefore to ascertain

11. Ibid., Section 132.
the meaning of a putative expression one is to go beyond the surface grammar and look into its actual uses in the language game which is its original home. Thus his remark "grammar is dangerous" is highly suggestive and the expression "do not think but look" is highly consequential in solving philosophical problems.

The above account does seem to betray what might be called a German idealistic tinge in Wittgenstein's philosophy. Words or the expressions are not definitions. The meaning of a term is not built into the very structure of it rather it has to be determined depending upon the mode of life or life situations to which it is necessarily bound up. In other words a word is not meaningful in isolation, it gets meaning only when it is related to the totality of experiences in the particular form of life. So determining the meaning of a word would consist in finding its relation to the totality. The understanding of one would involve reference to the total framework. In this respect there is a striking resemblance between Wittgenstein and Bradley with the exception that Bradley would refer to the absolute totality where as Wittgenstein would restrict it to a context. So the meaning of an expression is the way it is used is suggestive
of the fact that meanings are not discovered but rather attributed or ascribed to the words. Words do not have meaning but get meaning. As to the question whether a given proposition is meaningful or not Wittgenstein would ask us to appeal to one's linguistic intuition. The word linguistic intuition stands in need of clarification; linguistic intuition may be taken to mean one's capacity to understand, signifying therefore the ability of one to make sense out of a proposition. The ability to understand is largely determined by one's exposure to situations in and around - that is the richness of one's experience. For example - A man who is born blind cannot have visual concepts therefore cannot probably make sense out of a piece of poem about rainbow.

In this respect Wittgenstein makes a fundamental departure from the Kantian mode of thinking. Kant believes in the innate structure of human mind. The categories of understanding and forms of intuition are fixed and immutable and determine a priorily the nature and the limit of human knowledge. By definition if there could be anything that does not conform to the forms and categories would not only be unknown but will remain unknowable. Thus he restricts the domain of intelligibility to the
realm of phenomenon only. Wittgenstein offers a growing and dynamic interpretation of the notion of intelligibility. The meaning of an expression cannot be determined in abstraction i.e., irrespective of the language games in which it occurs. Even Wittgenstein suggests to invent possible language games. So in finding out the area of intelligibility one has to appeal not only to the existing uses of the expression but imagine a possible language game or a form of life in which it could meaningfully be employed. He observes that if the world were different where a patch of green or yellow colours cause pain or pleasure, the expression pleasure patches or pain patches could be taken as quite significant. But the capacity to invent and imagine a form of life would again depend on one's richness of experience. Thus a criterion of intelligibility cannot be a priorily fixed. The above observation of Wittgenstein urges one to rethink about the conclusions of analytical philosophers about the metaphysical propositions and the language of the mystics.

A few important questions can be raised in this connection. How many language games are there? Does Wittgenstein believes in a fixed number of language games? Let us answer these questions. The logic of language game
implies that their number is not fixed. Old games become extinct and new games might come into being. Moreover rules of a particular language game might also change. What does this amount to? Can we say that we can manufacture language games as we like? Wittgenstein has a very cautious reply to this. One is not "allowed" to manufacture language game as one likes. The acceptability of a language game depends upon its conformity to other existing language games. This is otherwise characterized by Wittgenstein as the content of the speech act. Consistency and conformity with other speech acts is the test for a fresh and singular speech act. This is how it can be said that Wittgenstein is an idealist. The totality of the speech acts has to be consistent whole otherwise nobody could understand it. A lion's talk cannot be understood by a man. This is a very significant statement made by Wittgenstein. This shows that simply uttering some words is not sufficient. Every speech act generates certain expectations. These expectations are anticipated speech acts which constitute the background against which a particular speech act can be understood. If this background is absent no speech act could be made intelligible. The totality of speech act is the totality of different forms
of life. Different forms of life are interconnected and one cannot understand it in isolation. This sort of relation among different forms of life excludes the possibility of certain forms of life being unintelligible. In other words Wittgenstein even goes to the extent of declaring that all forms of life are intelligible.