

Diñnāga's View on the Role of *Anyāpoha* (Exclusion of Others) in Understanding Word-meaning

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Abstract:

The present paper deals with the Buddhist theory of meaning which is known as *Apohavāda*, it was first propounded by Diñnāga. Diñnāga, the great Indian logician and the father of Buddhist nominalism, in his celebrated work *Pramāṇcamuccaya* mentioned the *apoha* theory which asserts that universal is not real, it has no reality; only the unique particular is real. According to Diñnāga, there is no need to assume the existence of real universals like "cowness" which is nothing but a class concept of the general term "cow". He argues that we have no requirement of any real universal, because it has no ability to identify or to express any particular entity. According to him, word as a linguistic sign cannot refer to the real object; it can only refer to the negation of others (*anyāpoha*). Diñnāga's conception of *anyāpoha* is a possible substitute for universal (*jāti* or *sāmānya*) of other realist school of Indian logic. The term "*sākṣādvṛtti*" is directly applicable to the universal which, in other words, is known as *anyāpoha* or negation of other. The term *anyāpoha* means negation of others or negation of contrary or exclusion of others (i.e. the double negation or the joint negation). Though Diñnāga claims that the general term does not denote its particular as its own referent, yet, for alternative suggestion, he offers that a word denotes its own referent by the exclusion of others.

Keywords: Nominalism, exclusion of others (*anyāpoha*), linguistic sign, import of words, conceptual construction, reality.

Introduction:

Diñnāga (c.480 – 540 AD) was born in the neighbourhood of Kāñci of Southern India from a brahmin family. He was a direct disciple of Vasubandhu.¹ But most probably Vasubandhu was an old man as well as well known Buddhist scholar when Diñnāga came to attend to his lesson.² Diñnāga attained celebrity as an independent scholar and, at the same time, his nominalism and *apoha* theory were greatly influenced by Bhartṛhari, Vyāḍhi and Kātyāyana.³

The exclusion theory of meaning, which is generally known as Nominalism but technically called as *Apohavāda*, deals with concept, thought, linguistic sign (*śabda*), word-meaning (import of words), universal, meaning of general term, external world, reality, etc. The problem of universal and the problem of import of words as discussed and critically examined by the Indian philosophers are the subject matters not only of ontology but also of both epistemology and the philosophy of language. The problem of universals is generally considered as the most fundamental and controversial problem of philosophy. In our everyday common language we very often use the general terms to express common properties and also use other terms to indicate particular objects. For example, the term "cow" is used for particular object, and the term "cowness" is used for common properties of that object. When we say "This is a red pen" and "This is a red flag" then, are these two colours the same? Is there any common property in between them? Do these two objects share something in common? So the problems of universal are considered as very difficult topic in the domain of philosophy and become controversial issue, so far, our experiences, thoughts, language, statements, application of propositions and expression of knowledge are concerned. In fact, there are two kinds of knowledge of objects, one is sensuous (perceptual) and other is conceptual. Our sensuous knowledge is the knowledge of particular

object, which presents the individual or particular with its special aspects. The conceptual knowledge, on the other hand, presents the same thing without any reflection of individuality or particularity.⁴

For the first time in Indian Philosophy, Diĥnāga (400 AD) in his *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (hereafter *PS*) mentioned the *apoha* theory which is related to many logical, epistemological and metaphysical problems. The *Apoha* theory cannot be comprehended unless we try to understand the basic structure of the Buddhist epistemology. According to Diĥnāga, the unique particular (*svalakṣaṇa*) is the object of perception and the universal (*sāmānya lakṣaṇa*) is the object of inference.⁵ In Buddhist epistemology there are two kinds of truth: phenomenal truth (*samvṛiti sat*) and transcendental truth (*paramārtha sat*). The phenomenal existence is true only pragmatically, it is rejected by transcendental existence.⁶ Diĥnāga, the great Indian logician and the father of Buddhist nominalism, holds that universal (*jāti or sāmānya*) has no external reality, and general term has no reference to the real entity. As an exclusion theorist he holds that the denotation is not the primary function of language. He used the logical term *anyāpoha* (exclusion of others) to solve the problems of universal and by this notion he explains the *apoha* theory which asserts that whatever is determined by the word as an intended object is actually qualified by the negation of other; but it is not mere negation.

Anyāpoha as the possible substitute for universal:

The understanding of word-meaning without accepting the universal as real entity cannot be possible unless we understand the notion of *anyāpoha* (exclusion of others) what Diĥnāga offered in his nominalism. In fact, the method of exclusion on which the *apoha* theory is grounded and as Diĥnāga puts it very logically, is derived from the concept “*anyāpoha*” (double negation i.e. the negation of others). In Sanskrit, the philosophical explanation of the term “*apoha*” is *apa + uha = apoha*⁷ and in English this term means other + exclusion i.e. equivalent to the Sanskrit explanation *anya + apoha = anyāpoha*.⁸ *Anyāpoha* signifies a logical method of exposition. John Brough mentioned the term “discrimination” for *apoha*, Dhirendra Sharma used “differentiation”, B. P. Bhattacharya used “negation” and K. Kunjani Raja used “exclusion”.⁹ According to the Buddhist epistemology, a thought- image (*vikalpa*) is differentiated from all other thought- images by the method of double negation. The word “cow” means all that is true of not non-cow; it means that a proposition such as “this is cow” is based on the experience of exclusion of all that is non-cow. The word “cow” signifies the object as excluded from the non-cow.¹⁰

In Diĥnāga’s ontological programme on import of words *anyāpoha* (negation of others) is the key-concept. According to Diĥnāga, every term is considered to be the negation of its own negation. He holds that co-references (linguistic phenomena) can be expressible only when both universals and particulars are understood in terms of *anyāpoha*. For example, the term “blue” means not non-blue and the general term “blueness” is the same as the expression that is “blueness = not non-blueness”. It means that whatever is signified by a general term is nothing but negation of others (*anyāpoha*) by which a class concept can also be understood indirectly. Diĥnāga maintains that the meaning of general term or word is *apoha*. In general a word cannot refer to the positive things of external world, because positive things are momentary (point-instant real or thing-in-itself), they are by nature unique particular (*svalakṣaṇa*). They, therefore, cannot be determined by the denotation of words. The meaning of word is the result of conceptual construction which is constructed (as a form of imagination) in the mind by the method of exclusion. In the Buddhist system it is technically known as *anyāpoha* or briefly *apoha*.¹¹

According to the *apoha* theory, the unique particular (*svalakṣaṇa*) being the ultimate real can’t be denoted by words, because it cannot be determined by the convention or usage, though these are the pre-requisite elements for verbal cognition. But, the meaning of word can be determined by the idea of double negation or the method of *anyāpoha*. The uttered speech that we use in our conversation can’t describe the real thing (the extreme point-instant real entity or *kṣaṇika*), because the reality is beyond human speech. By an uttered word no one eliminates or negates anything, because word does not refer to the total negation. It refers neither to a unique particular nor the universal, because when a word is uttered then particular is not present this time to our eyes as it is presented in our perception. So, a word does not refer to any real entity.¹²

The Bhaṭṭa Mimāṃsaka holds that the word “cow” means the universal cowness. The Naiyāyika maintains that the word “cow” refers to an individual cow in which the universal cowness inheres. Both schools are realist about universals. But Diñnāga maintains nominalism which holds that universal has no reality, it is nothing but mental construction (*vikalpa*). He clearly holds that the general term (*jātiśabda*) or the universal does not express the particular. It means the term “cowness” cannot express an individual cow, because individuals are limited in number. So, whatever is signified by the universal is neither the particular thing (individual) nor the unique particular (*svalakṣaṇa*). Whatever is signified by a word through the method of exclusion (*anyāpoha*) is not the unique particular but the universal.¹³

But, one question is relevant here, if the Buddhists do not admit universal as real entity, then how can class-concept what we very often use to mention a class in general in our convention be defined properly? In other words, if universals are mere names and they have no referent at all, then how do you (the Buddhist) express the term “cowness” or “blueness”? Diñnāga's answer in reply is that the class-concepts or universals serve only the purpose of exclusion of differentiation of a class from another class. The general property in a referent (meaning of the general term) is determined by its exclusion of other referents (*yathā cārthāntarāpohenārthe sāmānyam, tathā śabdāntaravyudāsenā śabde sāmānyam ucyate.*-PS, 5. 33).¹⁴ The general property in a word can be explained as it is excluded from other words. It means, a cow is called cow not because it is a particular member of class-concept “cowness” what is admitted by the realist, but because it is differentiated or excluded from all things which are not non-cow. Diñnāga maintains this view by introducing the new concept *anyāpoha* (negation of others) which suggests that the word ‘cow’ means not non-cow. Similarly when one uses the word ‘cowness’, it is excluded from others such as horseness, lioness etc. So, universals have no reality, they are mere names in our mental constructions determined by negative connotation.¹⁵

According to Diñnāga, there is no need to assume the existence of real universals like “cowness”, because it is nothing other than a class concept of the general term “cow”. He argues that we have no requirement of any real universal, because it has no ability to identify or to express any particular entity.¹⁶ In the Buddhist epistemology the phenomenal truth (*samvṛtisat*) is real only pragmatically and it has been refuted from the point of view of transcendental truth (*paramārthasat*).¹⁷ From the ontological point of view, to the Buddhist logicians (like Diñnāga and Dharmakīrti) universal is nothing but general properties, which is the object of inference. It is defined by the differentiation or the exclusion of others. Both Massaki Hattori and Richard P. Hayes clearly observe that Diñnāga's conception of *anyāpoha* is a substitute for a universal (*jāti* or *sāmānyā*) of other realist school of Indian logic. The term “*sākṣādvṛtti*” is directly applicable to the universal which is nothing but *anyāpoha* or negation of other.¹⁸ Diñnāga's controversial doctrine of *anyāpoha* (exclusion of contrary) in the context of Indian logic is however considered as a an important key-concept to the *apoha* theory of meaning and is to be considered as a ‘possible nominalistic substitute for universals that are reified as the meaning of general terms.’¹⁹

Linguistic sign and inferential sign:

In the chapter-v of *Pramāṇasamuccaya* Diñnāga formulates the *apoha* theory which is based on the import of words or word-meaning qualified by the exclusion of other things; but it is not an independent means other than inference (*anumāna*). In order to explain this view R. P. Hayes clearly says, “Verbal communication is in principle no different from inference.”²⁰ Diñnāga first introduced this theory to search the knowledge of objects through the word-meaning without accepting the universal as the real entity. According to him, there is no difference between an inferential sign and a linguistic sign, or between an inference and a word, both of them generate knowledge in similar way – the way or the method of exclusion of others.²¹ As a linguistic sign a word expresses an object not directly but indirectly or negatively through the exclusion of others. For example, the word ‘cow’ expresses its own object (cow) through the method of exclusion of others (*anyāpoha*). By the term “*anyāpoha*” he tries to mean the logical method of exposition which is used in a form of ‘negation of others’ (cow = not non-cow). For example, the word ‘cow’ refers the negation of other things which are not cow, i.e., cow means not non-cow. Here, the term ‘not’ means the negation (*niṣedha*) and ‘non-cow’ indicates things other than cow (non-cow means things which are not cow, but lions, horses etc.).

Diñnāga strongly claims that there is no real distinction between an inferential sign and a linguistic sign (*napramāṇāntaraṃ śabdān anumānāt tathāhi tat, kṛtakatvādivat svārtham anyāpohena bhāṣate.*),²²

and there is no positive reality of word-meaning. H. S. Prasad has clearly explained this *Kārikā* in the following way.

“Word –generated knowledge is not a different source of knowledge from inferential knowledge; the word designates its own object by negating other than what it designates just as the inferential sign having been genuinely established establishes what is to be proved. This *kārikā* clearly says that the process of knowing derived from a word or a linguistic sign is similar to the process of knowing from inferential sign.”²³

The function of a linguistic sign is identical with the function of an inferential sign (*liṅga*).²⁴ In the process of *svārthānumāna* (inference for one’s own sake) an inferential sign indirectly proves the object (*sādhya*) of inference through the negation of others.²⁵ For example, when we infer fire (*sādhya*) through the inferential sign “smoke” (*liṅga/hetu*), according to Diṅnāga, it is inferred by the exclusion of non-fire, and when we see smoke in a locus (*pakṣa*) then we actually get the cognition of common properties of fire through the exclusion of what is not fire, i.e., earth, water etc. So it is clear from the above discussion that an inferential sign expresses the object (*sādhya*) by means of the exclusion of others. In the same way a linguistic sign (*śabda*) also functions like this. As a linguistic sign a word indirectly indicates an object through the method of exclusion. For example, the word “cow” simply indicates its object (cow) indirectly by the method of exclusion of others. The method of exclusion is also known as negation of others (*anyāniṣedha*), it follows the expression “cow = not non-cow”.

Understanding of word-meaning in terms of negation:

The exclusion theory of meaning implies that ‘to be the meaning of a word is to be excluded from others’. Diṅnāga repeatedly claims that the explication of the concept of word-meaning cannot be possible unless we apply the notion of determination through exclusion. Exclusion or differentiation is the means to the understanding of word-meaning and also a logical function of exposition by which a word indirectly expresses its intended object. Though Diṅnāga claims that the general term does not denote its particular as its own referent, yet, for alternative suggestion, he suggests that a word denotes its own referent by the exclusion of others (*tenānyāpohakṛc chrutiḥ*, PS, 5. 11, *kṛtakatvādivat svārtham anyāpohena bhāṣate*, PS,5.1).²⁶

However, Diṅnāga in his *Pramāṇasamuccaya* - 5.25-38 reminds us to note that the method of exclusion (*anyāpoha*) cannot be universally applicable for the all cases of understanding of word-meaning. He has mentioned the following three cases where the method of exclusion is not applicable:

- i) In the case of two synonyms (*paryyāyaśabda*), for example, ‘*vrkṣa*’ and ‘*taru*’, exclusion is not possible. The actual meaning of the two terms is same, i.e. tree. The denotable objects of general terms, particular terms and synonyms are not excluded, though they are different but their referents being different is the same (*anyate’pi na sāmānyabhedaparyāyavācyaṇut*, PS, 5.25). It is admissible, because synonyms are not in conflict (*avirodhāt*).²⁷
- ii) In the case of the word ‘*vrkṣa*’ and the word ‘*pārthiva*’ – the first does not exclude the second. It means the two words are not excluded with each other.
- iii) In the case of word ‘*sat*’- it is neither excluded nor encompasses the meaning of ‘*dravya*’, ‘*pārthiva*’ etc.²⁸

But, in this context an important question may be raised that is, what is the reason by which a particular or a general term excludes the referent of other particulars or general terms? Diṅnāga’s answer is that a particular or a general term is certainly excluded from the referents of other particulars or general terms, because they are in conflict with one another (*bhedo bhedāntarārthaṃ tu virodhitvād apohate*, PS, 5.28).²⁹

Conclusion:

Most of Indian scholars claim that Diṅnāga is no doubt an extreme nominalist, because he finally rejects the real existence of universal and introduces the *apoha* theory without accepting any universal or any

general term as real entity. Diñnāga's doctrine of *anyāpoha* is basically derived from the notion of double negation (i. e. 'p = ~ ~ p' or 'cow = ~ ~ cow' or 'cow = not non-cow'). In English the term "negation" means non-existence and contradiction. The term "negation", in Indian context, is the same as *abhāva* (negation or the contradiction or non-existence) which is, however, very important but controversial concept in Diñnāga's doctrine of *anyāpoha*. In the Buddhist theory of meaning the function of double negation is basically maintained as a method of exposition under the standard account of negation in logic. In fact, the two negatives (negation of contrary) lead to a forceful assertion of the original thought.³⁰ According to Diñnāga, the objective world, as it exists in time and space, is nothing but a series of momentary particulars or unique particulars in the universal flux of time. Word cannot denote the thing which is point-instant real; it only denotes the negation of what it is not. The role of a word is to exclude what is other. A word, therefore, expresses its own meaning through the exclusion of others. Diñnāga finds a new entity, defined in terms of the primitive relation between exclusion and otherness, which can act as a proxy for a universal.³¹

Prof. B. K. Matilal rightly remarks that Diñnāga was a negativist, because he first introduced the notion 'negation of others' by using the term '*anyāpoha*' and propounded the exclusion theory of meaning (*Apohavāda*) by rejecting the reality of thing- universals or phenomenal universals. This theory asserts that "the function of language is negative (exclusion); it does not entail talking about any positive entity such as cow-universal."³² So, as a linguistic sign a word cannot denote an object directly, but it can denote its object only indirectly or negatively. So, when Diñnāga declares that a word refers to a negation and neither a real universal nor a particular, he only emphasises this negative implication of verbal import.³³ In the context of Indian logic, the notion of *anyāpoha* can be considered as a method of exposition. Some post Diñnāga scholars like Jayamiśra and many more also think that Diñnāga's *apoha* doctrine depends on the method of joint negation (or joint absence) and he therefore is a negativist (*vyatirekavādin*) extremely.³⁴ Though the notion of *anyāpoha* is not totally free from opponent's objections, yet, it is possible to say that Diñnāga has paid the great attention to the exclusion theory of meaning which, as Jinendrabuddhi in his commentary of *Pramāṇasamuccaya* points out, gives us a new interpretation of the real essence of the theory of negative meaning of words what opponents by mistake always ignore.³⁵

Notes and References:

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15. See *Buddha Tarkabhāsā of Moksakaragupta*, by B. N. Singh, Asha Prakashana, Varanasi, 1985, Pp.116-19.
16. Prof. B. K. Matilal says, “... Diṅnāga who propounded his theory of *apoha* or ‘exclusion’ as word – meanings rejecting the reality of the thing-universals or phenomenal universals.” See, Matilal, B, K. (2001), *The Word and the World: op. cit.*, p. 31.
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