

THE PROBLEM OF 'EMPTY TERMS' IN NAVYA NYĀYA PHILOSOPHY

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It seems that we can talk meaningfully about non-existing things but interestingly there is nothing that we can refer to. As understood, a sentence can only be meaningful if the subject term refers to something existing out there. The problematic discussed by the Navya Nyāya in its philosophical logic related to the empty terms has far reaching significance. Some examples of the empty terms that are often found in the Nyāya literature are 'the rabbits horn', 'golden mountain', 'the son of a barren woman', 'the sky flower', 'the winged horse' etc.. An empty term is a term that lacks a referent. The Buddhists and the Mimāṃsakas are considerate to some extent in accepting a weak form of the empty terms, but the Naiyāyikas are vehemently opposed to any such place for the empty terms.

When empty terms like ‘the rabbit’s horn’, ‘the sky-flower’, ‘the son of a barren woman’, ‘golden mountain’, ‘the winged horse’, etc. are present as a subject term in a judgment then things turn problematic and this problem is found in both logic and epistemology. The term ‘sky flower’ is empty because there is nothing that it refers to. The sentence ‘sky flower is fragrant’ has meaning though there is no sky flower. There is no denying the fact that we can understand the sentence ‘There is no such thing as sky flower’. Now, the question is: why are we justified in calling such type of expressions meaningful, although they do not denote anything real? The fact is that the understanding of substantive expressions does not imply that it has a reference, to quote Matilal, “understanding of its meaning precedes the knowledge of whether or not the expression actually refers to any real entity.¹” So, we are justified in calling empty terms as meaningful, even though they do not denote anything real.

Conditions to Determine Meaningfulness of the Empty Terms

Let us now discuss conditions which determine the meaningfulness of an empty term. According to the Nyāya, there are at least three conditions which determine the meaningfulness of an expression which contains an empty term. These conditions dictate when the occurrence of an empty term in a sequence of words prohibits the sequence from constituting a meaningful sentence, they specify the circumstances in which a given sequence of morphemes do not have a mutual syntactical expectancy and therefore has no meaning.

To understand these three conditions, the Nyāya concept of cognition needs to be explained briefly. The Nyāya draws a distinction between qualificative (determinate) and non-qualificative (indeterminate) cognitions. A non-qualificative cognition is often referred to as non-relational or indeterminate cognition. In non-qualificative cognition an object is cognized distinctly, that means, non-qualificative cognition is not presented under a certain mode of presentation or in a certain relation. The Nyāya concept of qualificative cognition can be stated by a compound expression of the form ‘xRy’. If we analyse the form then we see that there are

¹Matilal, B. K. (1985). *Logic, Language and Reality: An introduction to Indian Philosophical Studies*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Pvt. Ltd. p. 86.

certainly at least three elements in a qualificative cognition. These are a qualificand, a relationship between qualificand and qualifier and a qualifier.

The second element could be called the ‘qualification relationship’ at the cognitive level, the relationship between qualificand and qualifier. Perszyk explains, “in a certain relationship, the simplest qualificative cognition has as its object a pot along with potness. This complex is stated by the expression ‘a pot’, and explained by the more complex expression ‘potness inheres in a particular pot-individual’.”² It should be stated that the expression ‘a pot’ is a linguistic expression of cognition and an analysis of the similar cognition in Nyāya language is the expression ‘potness inheres in a particular pot-individual.’

In a determinate cognition, the qualifier is provided by the mode of presentation of the qualificand. An object is recognized under a certain mode of presentation in a qualificative cognition; something is recognized as having a certain features. But the main components of a qualificative cognition are recognized by themselves in a non-qualificative cognition. For the cognition xRy , R is the qualification relation (*viśesya-visesana- sambandha*) and y is a qualifier, x is the qualificand. The expression ‘ xRy ’ may be used as a kind of description. It should be mentioned in the above sense that ‘ R ’ is not a constant. Here, R is nothing more than a known relationship between x and y . For example, to prove a qualificative cognition, the expression ‘a pot’ can be used. Here, the qualificand is an individual pot, the qualifier is potness in this cognition, the way a pot is presented, and also the qualification relationship is inherent. In this cognition, we find that an individual pot in the relationship of inherence is recognized under the mode of potness.

According to the Nyāya, relations are dyadic and have a direction, the direction being from the second term to the first term, and triadic, tetradic, pentadic and so forth relations are reducible to a series of dyadic relations. It is also important to mention that while x is recognized under some mode of presentation, which is limited by a property (x -ness), y is limited by a property (y -ness) and the relationship

² Perszyk, K. J. (1984). The Nyaya and Russell on Empty Terms. *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 34, No. 2, p. 144.

R, i.e. *y* is recognized as the second term of R. The limiting concept or mode of presentation is similar to the sense of Frege. Just as sense determines a reference for Frege, so the mode of presentation of an object determines its referent for the Nyāya, “the limiters of the qualificand and the qualifier need not be generic properties or universals; rather, they can be what the Nyāya calls analysable or unanalysable imposed properties. An imposed property is a property whose existence is indistinguishable from the individual which possesses it; that is, unlike a generic property, an imposed property has no separate ontological status over and above the individual by which it is instantiated. The property of being John is an example of an unanalysable imposed property; the property of being the eldest son of John is an example of an analysable imposed property. It is an analysable property in the sense that it is compound or complex, its constituents being the terms ‘eldest’, ‘son’, ‘eldest son’ and ‘John’.”³

If in an expression a logical proper name occurs and no objection has been seen or known by anyone in the world corresponding to this name, the expression is meaningless and the question of its truth or falsehood is nonsensical. There are no meaningful atomic empty terms, according to the Nyāya. If the expression ‘*xRy*’ is a representation of an atomic qualificative cognition, then to be meaningful, the terms ‘*x*’ and ‘*y*’ of that relationship must be non-empty. This does not mean that all empty terms can be analysed in ‘*xRy*’ form; instead, only those that can be analysed in ‘*xRy*’ form are meaningful.

If a logical proper name is empty, there is no possible qualificand corresponding to it. If there is no possible qualificand, there is no qualifier corresponding to that qualificand and if there is no qualificand and no qualifier, there is no qualification relation. That is to say, there is a vacuous meaning-complex corresponding to unanalysable empty terms. That means there is no ‘*xRy*’ form corresponding to unanalysable empty terms. But it does not follow from this that all empty terms which are not logical proper names, but which are meaningful; generate unified cognition of the form ‘*xRy*’. What follows is that it is impossible to distinguish the meanings of unanalysable terms, for they are meaningless. If ‘sky-

³Shaw, J.L. (1974). Empty Terms: The Nyāya and the Buddhists. *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 2: p. 332.

flower' and 'winged-horse' are unanalysable terms which signify different unexemplified properties, it must be the case that we can distinguish the meanings of these terms. However, if they have no corresponding ' xRy ' forms, they are meaningless; and if there is no ground to differentiate their meanings, there is no justification for the claim that they signify different properties.

If 'Gautama' is a logical proper name such that nobody has ever seen or known the person called 'Gautama', the verbal expressions 'Gautama is fat', 'Gautama is not fat', 'Gautama exists', and 'Gautama does not exist' are non-significant, and the question of their truth or falsity is spurious. Jagadīśa thinks that if there is no Gautama, there is no mutual syntactical expectancy between the nominal root 'Gautama' and the nominative case ending 'ḥ'. A combination of two morphemes has mutual syntactical expectancy if and only if there is the possibility of a relation between them such that this relation is connected with some cognition. At the cognitive level, the referent of a morpheme is either a qualificand or a qualifier. However, if there is no Gautama, there is no possible qualificand corresponding to the nominal root 'Gautama'. If there is no possible qualificand, there is no qualifier; and if there is no qualificand and no qualifier, there is no qualification relation. Consequently, since 'Gautamaḥ' is excluded from the class of names, the above expression in which 'Gautamaḥ' occurs is also excluded from the class of sentences.

According to the Nyāya, those empty terms which are not logically proper names are non-atomic. However, it does not follow from this that an expression which contains an analysable empty term is meaningful. An empty term is said to be 'analysable' when it can be replaced by at least two atomic terms which have exemplification in the world. There are two rules governing the formation of a significant negative expression which directly affect the meaning of a sequence of words containing empty terms. If a term signifies a property present in every entity, its negation is not well-formed. According to the Nyāya, 'existence', 'knowability', and 'nameability' refer to universal properties. All objects are characterized by the property denoted by these words or can be located in any object. The negative expression would be meaningless if we were to form a negative expression from a word signifying a universal property. This reveals that the Nyāya does not agree with

the idea that if an expression is meaningful then it will also mean its negation. If this idea is called ‘the significant criterion for negative’, then this criterion is not accepted by the Nyāya as a universally applicable criterion. “The term ‘nameability’ refers to the nameability of a property. But the term ‘unnameability’ is an empty term, because it has nothing to do with anything. Therefore, sentences such as ‘no existent object is unnameable’ or ‘all unnameable objects are non-existent’ do not deal with the principles for the formation of negative expressions, whereas sentences such as ‘all existent objects are nameable’ are true.”⁴

Matilal thinks that like ‘unnameable’, the terms ‘non-existent’ and ‘unknowable’ are non-significant empty terms. There is no mutual expectation of a sequence of words containing one or more of these. The Nyāya does not permit a pure absence; an absence in some locus is always the absence of something.

A second rule is that if ‘not-x’ is meaningful, then ‘x’ cannot be an empty term. The negation must have ontological status in order to be well-formed, because if it were unreal, we would negate that which is nothing. “Since negation depends on the Nyāya affirmation, the cognition expressed by the term ‘absence of x’ depends on the cognition expressed by ‘x’; the cognition of the absence of x presupposes the cognition of x.”⁵In other words, one cannot have the thought of the absence of x without the thought of x and one cannot have the absence of x as the content of cognition unless one can have x as the content. “The ‘absence of x’ is meaningful if we can recognize what it is for x to be present by some relationship somewhere else and what it is to be present somewhere else for the absence of x.”⁶ To speak of an absence of x as present somewhere sounds confusing. In order to understand Nyāya’s thesis, we should keep the following points in mind. According to the Nyāya, x is property if and only if there exists a y such that y is the locus of x. If the absence of x characterizes a locus, the absence of x is given equal status with x itself, that is, the

⁴ Matilal, B. K. (2005). *Epistemology, Logic and Grammar in Indian Philosophical Analysis*. Edited by Jonardon Ganeri, New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 98.

⁵ Shaw, J.L. (1974). Empty Terms: The Nyāya and the Buddhists. *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 2: p. 332.

⁶ Matilal, B. K. (1970). Reference and Existence in Nyaya and Buddhist Logic. *Journal of Indian Philosophy* no. 1: pp. 89-90.

absence of x is also a property. When it is said that an absence of x is present somewhere, what is meant is that the absence of x characterizes a locus y. B. K. Matilal has summarized the Nyāya thesis in the following way “Thus if red-colour characterizes things that are red, absence of red-colour characterizes things that are not red. But if there were nothing that was not red, our talk of absence of red-colour would have been declared an empty or unexampled property, i.e., an unreal property, which is not usable in logical or philosophical discourse.”⁷ When Nyāya says that “the ‘absence of x’ is meaningful if we can recognize what it is for x to be present by some relationship somewhere else and what it is to be present somewhere else for the absence of x”⁸. This amounts to saying that the ‘absence of x’ is meaningful if and only if x exists in reality and the absence of x exists in reality somewhere else. Accordingly, if ‘x’ is an empty term, the ‘absence of x’ is a nonsignificant expression, and the expression in which the ‘absence of x’ occurs is meaningless.

Let us see the sentence ‘Pegasus does not exist’. If ‘Pegasus does not exist’ means ‘There is an absence of a winged horse’, the Nyāya will say that this is nonsignificant. However, if it means ‘There is an absence of wings in a horse’, then it is meaningful and true. The sentence ‘There is a hare’s horn on the table’ is meaningful, but ‘There is no hare’s horn on the table’ is meaningless because the expression ‘absence of a hare’s horn’ is nonsignificant. This expression becomes meaningful if it is transformed into either ‘A hare which is not on the table has an absence of a horn’ or ‘A hare which is on the table has an absence of a horn’.

Conditions for a Meaningful Sentence

According to the theory of *śābdabodha*, in order to understand the meaning of a sentence the hearer must understand the meanings of the words of the sentence recognize their syntactical and semantical appropriateness, be able to synthesize the word-meanings into a single related meaning, and be able to understand by reference to the speaker’s intention. The knowledge of the meaning of a sentence or a combination of words arises under the four conditions- *ākāṅkṣā*, *yogyatā* and *āsatti* and *tātparya*. In his article, Indian Theorists on the Nature of the Sentence B. K.

⁷ Ibid. p. 90.

⁸ Matilal, B. K. (2005). *Epistemology, Logic and Grammar in Indian Philosophical Analysis*. Edited by Jonardon Ganeri, New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 102.

Matilal mentions that *Ākāṅkṣā* could well mean the expectation or desire on the part of the audience roused by the incompleteness of an utterance.

Mutual expectancy or *ākāṅkṣā* occurs when a word is unable to convey a complete sense in the absence of another word and the hearer's desire to know the other words that will complete the sense of the speaker's utterance. In this regard, let us look at Annambhaṭṭa's statement on *ākāṅkṣā*. Annambhaṭṭa's says that if a linguistic item x cannot generate an integrated meaning-cognition due to the absence of a linguistic item y, then x is said to have mutual expectancy with respect to y.

“A word is said to bear the relation of expectancy to another word if it cannot without the latter produce awareness of its interconnection in speech.”⁹For example, *Gautamaḥ vanam gacchati* (Gautama goes to the village) is a statement in which the word *Gautamaḥ* bears expectancy to the word *gacchati* (*verb*), and then the word *gacchati* bears expectancy for *vanam*. Similarly, the stem *Gautama* bears expectancy for *h*, the stem *vana* for *am* (the second case-ending) and *gam* (the root) for *ti*. A stem (*nāma*) and a case-ending (*vibhakti*), a root (*dhātu*) and a verbal suffix (*ākhyāta*), and a verb (*kriyā*) and a case (*karaka*) bear expectancy for each other.

Regarding the condition of *ākāṅkṣā* or mutual expectancy, Navya Nyāya philosophers come up with the following explanation. “Expectancy is a syntactical relation based on semantical fitness. Words that occur in a sentence must be ordered or concatenated in such a way that the whole sentence can mean a relational complex. Therefore, we have the following four words in the sentence ‘*ghaṭamānaya*’-(a) *ghaṭa*, (b) *am*, (c) *ā+ni*, (d) *hi*. According to the philosophers of Navya Nyāya, expectancy is the concatenation in that order of the four words.”¹⁰Hence, the ‘word-order’ is just the last word as qualified by the former word and so on. But the words ‘*ghaṭa*’ preceded by ‘*karmatva*’ etc. do not generate any cognition of the meaning of the sentence. Because in that order, no cognition of a relational structure is generated by these words.

⁹ Potter, K. H. & Bhattacharyya, S. (edit.) (1993). *Indian Philosophical Analysis Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas from Gaṅgeśa to Raghunātha Śīromaṇi*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. Vol.VI, p. 262.

¹⁰Bhattacharyya, S. (edit.) (1996). *Gaṅgeśa's Theory of Indeterminate Perception Nirvikalpakavāda*. New Delhi: ICPR. p. 138.

This view of expectation as a syntactic relationship is based on the principle that the cognition of a relationship between objects meant by words has been defined by the order of words only, because no word can mean a relationship at all. Because of this, what is meant by a word must be recognized in a presentation mode. Therefore, “expectancy is not just any and every order between words, but only that order between words that produces the cognition of a relational structure as the meaning of the sentence.”¹¹

The explanation continues, “a cognition of the relationship between objects defined by verbs and objects is not due to the cognition of expectation. This relationship is generated by contiguity between the meaning of a verb and the nominative in a sentence, according to these philosophers.”¹² The cognition of expectancy generates the cognition of a relational structure only in the case of objects meant by either a nominative or a verbal root and objects meant by their suffixes.

Yogyatā is the second condition which is considered to be one of the factors involved in the understanding of the meaning of the sentence uttered. Every word can raise expectancy and a desire for the completion of a thought, so that the meaning of a word requires something else in combination with which it may become more complete to thought. The desire for completion exhibited by the meaning of a word is not blind. When two meanings are combined then their combination is not a mere external relation, but it is internally determined by both. This is *Yogyatā* which must obtain between the two meanings that are to be combined. *Yogyatā* has been reduced more as semantical compatibility, competency, acceptability, consistency, congruity etc. In a common way, “*yogyatā* can be defined as the mutual congruity or fitness of one word-meaning or significant-content with another word-meaning or significant-content in accordance with the syntactical-grammatical connections of the respective words expressing those meanings.”¹³

“*Yogyatā* is the logical compatibility of the words consistency in a sentence for mutual association. Really it involves a judgement on a sentence’s sense or

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 138.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 138.

¹³ Bilimoria, P. (1988). *Śabdapramāṇa*. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd. p.195.

nonsense. The meaning of a sentence should not be contradicted by experience.”¹⁴It is non-contradiction of the relation between one thing and another signified by two words that are intended. In simple word, *yogyatā* is the congruity of the words in a sentence for mutual association. A standard Indian example contrasts the sentence ‘He wets it with water’ with the sentence ‘He wets it with fire’. The sentence ‘He wets it with water’, which has *yogyatā* because wetting is usually done with a liquid like water. But the sentence ‘He wets it with fire’, which lacks *yogyatā* because wetting cannot be done with fire. Since a sentence implies a relational complex, words that take place in the sentences must indicate objects that can be related through the relationships that are implied in the sentence. This is a fitness relationship between the meanings of the word and hence it is semantic in nature. But the objects will never be willing to hang together rather than fitness to form a relational structure.

“Fitness characterizes a word’s not bearing a meaning which is incompatible with the meanings of other words in an utterance. For instance, no verbal awareness is derived from such an utterance as *anginā ũ iñ cā* (sprinkle with fire) because fire cannot be an instrument in the act of sprinkling. Fitness may be certain or doubtful, but in either case, there will be verbal awareness.”¹⁵

We do not find any agreement of opinion regarding the exact role of *yogyatā* in the understanding of meaning from a sentence. Some Naiyāyikas give their own opinions. According to them, a conclusive knowledge of *yogyatā* is a prerequisite for verbal cognition. On the other hand, according to some other philosophers, regarding *yogyatā* what is required is only the absence of a knowledge of incompatibility. In this regard, Kumāriḷa Bhāṭṭa says that incompatibility with the real facts does not prevent verbal comprehension, nothing but only the validity of the knowledge. Perhaps it is the inconceivability of the mutual association of the word meanings that renders the whole sentence nonsensical; it is not the lack of correlation with the actual facts but the impossibility of connecting the word meaning that stands in the way of verbal comprehension.

¹⁴ Coward, H. G. & Raja K. K. (1990). *The Philosophy of the Grammarians*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. p.86.

¹⁵ Potter, K. H. & Bhattacharyya, S. (eds.) (1993). *Indian Philosophical Analysis Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas from Gaṅgeśa to Raghunātha Śiromani*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. Vol. VI, pp. 262-263.

The third condition for understanding sentence-meaning is *āsatti*. “The word ‘*āsatti*’ means a spatio-temporal contiguity between the words of a sentence.”¹⁶ Contiguity or *āsatti* is also referred to as *samnidhi*. It is more of a formal property than *ākāṅkṣā*. It is normally rendered as ‘proximity’, but we prefer ‘contiguity’ to ‘proximity’ as the former means a sense of continuity which the latter does not essentially convey. Contiguity means that there is no gap between the words a sentence or no gap in an expression. It is not acceptable for gaps that are not helpful to understanding the sense of a sentence. “Contiguity consists in the enunciation of words, which are connected with each other, without a long pause between them. For example- the utterance “bring water” will convey no meaning if one utters the word “bring” now and the word “water” after an hour.”¹⁷

Āsatti is contiguity between the two words presented for a combination. It is not adequate that the meanings of two words should be individually incomplete and should possess also the effectiveness for filling their mutual wants, but they should also be offered in close proximity, it is these two meanings that are also meant to be taken together. Non-fulfilment of this condition may give rise to doubt as to which words are meant to be taken together. It is a great syntactical mistake that often avoids the true knowledge of the meaning of a sentence.

“Words that occur in a sentence must have a proper contiguity relationship without which it is impossible to recognize the original meaning of the speaker. An ambiguity can result from this absence of contiguity in non-inflectional language as well as in an inflectional language.”¹⁸ *Āsatti* or *Sannidhi* is generally explained as the condition that the words in a sentence should be temporally contiguous. It is the uninterrupted utterance or the unbroken comprehension of words when they are in juxtaposition. “It is the apprehension, without an interval, of the meanings of words that are produced by those words. The clause, ‘that is produced by those words’, is inserted since the meanings of words apprehended by other means of knowledge do not lead to any (verbal) comprehension of their mutual connection.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Shaw, J. L. (2000). Condition for Understanding the meaning of a sentence: the Nyāya and the Vedānta. *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 28, p. 282.

¹⁷ Potter, K. H. & Bhattacharyya, S. (eds.) (1993). *Indian Philosophical Analysis Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas from Gaṅgeśa to Raghunātha Śīromaṇi*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. Vol. VI, p. 263.

¹⁸ Bhattacharyya, S. (edit.) (1996). *Gaṅgeśa’s Theory of Indeterminate Perception Nirvikalpakavāda*. New Delhi: ICPR. p. 138.

¹⁹ Dharmaraja Adhvarindra (2015). *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*. Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata. p.92

According to Bilimoria, “In early Nyāya understanding *āsatti* referred to the absence of any unnecessary intervention or interval between the strings of words in the utterance of a sentence.”²⁰ If there is to be a meaningful understanding of a sentence utterance then its constituent words must be continuous with one another in temporal and spatial sequence.

Again Kumāriḷa Bhaṭṭa says that it is the continuous moving of the words in the listener’s mind. The Prābhākaras also explain it in the same way. Lack of *āsatti* or *sannidhi* can occur in two ways - not being uttered together and not being signified by words. The Bhaṭṭa Mimāṃsakas hold that verbal cognition is possible only when the necessary words are together in the mind. Thus in the case of elliptical sentences, the Bhaṭṭa Mimāṃsakas want the missing words to be actually supplied.

The Navya Nyāya School defines *āsatti* or *sannidhi* as an immediate recollection of the meanings of words through their expressive power or secondary meanings, though the words are separated, there is *āsatti* if the meanings of the words are recollected without any interruption. This recognition happens in the case of verses. Early Naiyāyikas thought that the knowledge of *āsatti* is the cause of verbal comprehension. The Navya Nyāya School considers that *āsatti* itself is the cause.

In the case of elliptical sentences, in which the intended meaning is understood from the context even though some of the words necessary for syntactic completeness are lacking, the Bhatta Mimāṃsakas believe that it is necessary to supply the missing words in order to have verbal comprehension of the sentence meaning. The Prābhākaras hold that it is easier to supply the meaning than to presume the missing words as implied.

When above mentioned these three conditions are fulfilled then the meaning of a sentence can be known. But to know the meaning of a sentence this is not all. So long as a sentence is measured by itself, these three conditions are certainly adequate. But a sentence is not actually an isolated, non-concrete thing. A sentence is organically connected to a speaker which determines out of the several possible meanings of a sentence, the particular meaning related to a particular case. Therefore,

²⁰Bilimoria, P. (1988). *Śabdapramāṇa*. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd. p.181.

it is also essential to know the intention of the speaker. So, in this regard another condition must be taken into consideration and this condition is known as intention or *tātparya*. “Intention or *tātparya* refers to the meaning intended to be conveyed by an utterance, and it can be viewed as the meaning intended by the speaker or as the purport of the utterance.”²¹ When the ordinary or primary meaning does not suit and a secondary figurative meaning has to be found then this condition is mainly active. “If a word is ambiguous or homonymous then the sentence in which it is used would give rise to different cognitions even if it fulfils all other conditions for understanding its meaning. Consider the sentence ‘bring *saindhava*’. Since the *saindhava* in Sanskrit means both salt and horse, the sentence would generate the cognition of ‘bring salt’ or ‘bring a horse’”.²²

It is necessary to recognize the speaker's intention so that ambiguity is removed. The speaker's intention can be recognized from the context in which it is uttered. Moreover, “there are contexts where the intention of the speaker is necessary for understanding the meaning of a sentence.”²³ For example, ‘Protect the yoghurt from the crows’. “Here the speaker intends to use the word ‘crow’ to refer to any animal or bird which spoils the yoghurt.”²⁴ Therefore, to understand the meaning of a sentence that holds a metaphorical expression, the cognition of the speaker’s intention is necessary is the opinion of logicians. The term *tātparya* refers to the meaning intended to be conveyed by an utterance, and it can be viewed as the meaning intended by the speaker or as the purport of the utterance. The role of contextual factors in deciding this *tātparya* is also generally accepted by all.

We find that Modern logicians have given increasing attention to the problem of ‘empty terms’. ‘Empty Term’ is a meaningful expression, but it does not refer to anything real. An empty term is a term that is lacking in reference. There are so many meaningful and syntactically sufficient descriptions of language that mean some entities, but they really do not refer to anything in our everyday experience. We know

²¹Perrett, R. W. (2016). *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press. p.123.

²²Shaw, J. L. (2000). Conditions for Understanding the meaning of a sentence: the Nyāya and the Vedānta. *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 28, p. 283.

²³*Ibid.* p. 283.

²⁴*Ibid.* p. 283.

that the term 'sky-flower' is empty because the world has nothing to do with it. But although there is no sky-flower, the sentence 'sky-flower has good smell' has meaning. Even the sentence 'There is no such thing as sky-flower' can be understood. In this case, the term 'sky-flower' is meaningful. But why are we justified in calling sky-flower as meaningful, even though it denotes nothing real? The answer to the question is that it does not mean that it has a reference to understand a substantival expression. In simple words, understanding its meaning precedes knowing whether or not the expression certainly refers to any real entity. So, we are justified in calling empty terms like 'sky-flower' as meaningful, even though they do not denote anything real.

Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika theism has put forward one interesting argument about the problem of empty terms. Their argument is, 'God is' can be interpreted as follows: there is God, for denying His existence is nothing but affirming Him as God. So, we cannot negate any non-entity, and if we negate God significantly, we are bound to accept His 'entitative existence'. According to Naiyāyikas, the negatum cannot be a non-entity in all negations that we can speak of. But if we remove "God" from the subject position of the above statement and replace it with some such words like the hare's horn, the winged horse, etc. then regarding the non-existence of these entities both the theists and the atheists have common understanding. The principle that negation, if it is not to be absurd, must have an entity as its negatum and not a fiction will logically claim the 'entitative existence' of 'the hare's horn', or 'the winged horse' as well. Otherwise, saying that there is no hare's horn, etc., would be absurd.

Some Buddhist logicians claimed that in a certain mode of cognition, fictitious objects do appear. They said that "we tell fictitious stories and also we can conceive of unreal entities like the rabbit's horn or the hair of a turtle. It is not always the case that we have to know an object before we may make statements about it or attribute some property to it. A simple cognition, an error, a conceptual construction, or even a deliberate attempt at fiction, will be enough to justify our speech-acts about fictitious entities. And statements about fictitious entities like the rabbit's horn, sky-

flower may also serve some useful purpose in a logical discourse”²⁵But this view of the Buddhist logician is criticized by the Naiyāyikas. According to the Naiyāyikas, “if we allow statements about fictitious entities in a logical discourse- statements by which we purport to attribute some property to the fictitious entity- we will have no way of deciding whether they are true or false, for it will never be possible to experience the fictitious entity through any accredited means of knowledge.”²⁶They even said that mistaken cognitions do not reveal any object that is completely fictitious, but is produced in mistaken attributions of the qualifier. Additionally, they believe that both negatum and the locus of negation are real objects. Therefore, one cannot negate things like ‘the hare’s horn’ or ‘the round square’ significantly. But we find that neither the Nyāya nor the Buddhist want to countenance the world with strange entities such as the golden mountain or the rabbit’s horn.

Some philosophers say that entities like ‘the hare’s horn’ or ‘the winged horse’ are unactualized possibles. According to them, we do nothing more than deny their actuality when we negate them. The actuality is nothing more than a predictable attribute such as redness or roundness and can be compared with what we call ‘existence’. Therefore, negation or denial of existence to ‘the hare’s horn’, or ‘the winged horse’ is as meaningful as it is, entities that belong to the world of possibilities. But, Matilal thinks that if these philosophers are faced with a question, “What does your possibility consist in?” then perhaps there will be no direct and strong reply to this question. If they would choose the “round square” as an example instead of the “rabbit horn’s”, then the same argument will be thrust into that world of possibles? As the answer to these questions “extremists would want to ascribe subsistence to such self-contradictory things as the round square, and they would not object to such over-population of their strange universes of the possible-‘possible’, of course, to be understood in a special sense of their own.”²⁷

Sondada or Sondala attempts to demonstrate that in any loci, the negation of a self-contradictory term as an entity is actually felt. According to him, negation of one

²⁵Matilal, B. K. (2005). *Epistemology, Logic and Grammar in Indian Philosophical Analysis*. edit. Jonardon Ganeri, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 102.

²⁶*Ibid.* p. 101-102.

²⁷Matilal, B. K. (1985). *Logic, Language and Reality: An introduction to Indian Philosophical Studies*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Pvt. Ltd. p. 80.

entity is real and universally present as-qualified-by-a-non-resident-property. Gaṅgeśa rejects this view on the ground that a property that is non-resident in the negated entity, the absentee, cannot delimit the absentee-hood tagged to it. According to him, “our cognition of a negation of any entity is a cognition in which a qualified entity is also cognized to qualify another”.²⁸ Naiyāyikas, however, are forced to admit such negation where the absentee-hood is de-limited or conditioned as real by a non-compatible relationship.

There are two kinds of empty terms- singular and general. Either singular terms are logically proper names or singular terms are descriptions. Both logically proper names and descriptions are either empty or non-empty. We find that those expressions which contain empty logically proper names are non-significant. ‘sky-flower’ is an example of an empty singular term. It is a disguised description because the term ‘sky-flower’ can be replaced by ‘the sky-flower obtained by Devadatta’. When we were not able to divide the term ‘sky-flower’ into a combination of atomic constituents which have exemplification then the term ‘sky-flower’ would be nonsignificant. Similarly, general terms are either empty or non-empty. Empty general terms would be meaningful if they are analysable into a combination of at least two non-empty general terms. ‘Unicorn’ is an example of general empty terms. The term ‘unicorn’ is replaced by the meaning-complex ‘a horse with a horn’.

According to the Nyāya, there are no significant atomic empty terms. If no object corresponding to a name exists anywhere in the world, that which was supposed to be a name is not a name but a meaningless noise then the expression in which it arises is meaningless. The classical Nyāya wants to show that the meaning of a proper name is the referent itself, the individual apart from its qualities. But Navya Nyāya is opposed the classical Nyāya’s views and according to them the meaning of a proper name or term can never be the object designated by the name or term itself. They said that an object is always presented under some mode of presentation, and we always refer to an object by a property.

We would like to conclude by saying that there are two kinds of empty terms - unactualized empty terms and illusory empty terms. The school of Mīmāṃsā agrees

²⁸*Ibid.* p. 84.

with possible empty terms. According to them, even entities that are totally non-existent can generate cognition by word or speech. It is rather contradictory to say that we refer to non-existent entities by such expressions as ‘the rabbit’s horn’, ‘the sky-flower’ or ‘the son of a barren woman’. These examples are found everywhere in Nyāya literature. These are meaningful expressions and share the same substantial structure in common. This expression can be used positively in the sense where a proper name might have been used. Understanding its meaning precedes knowing whether or not the expression certainly refers to any real entity. But expressions like ‘round square’, ‘circular triangle’ etc. are impossible empty terms. These are impossible objects and we will never perceive these empty terms in future also. We know that the term ‘square’ cannot be defined by the term ‘circle’. Likewise, the term ‘circle’ cannot be defined by the term ‘triangle’.

Nyāya tries to show that “if we allow statements about fictitious entities in a logical discourse- statements by which we purport to attribute some property to the fictitious entity- we will have no way of deciding whether they are true or false, for it will never be possible to experience the fictitious entity through any accredited means of knowledge.”²⁹ But the Buddhists claim that we do utter statements about fictitious entities. They say,

“we tell fictitious stories and also we can conceive of unreal entities like the rabbit’s horn or the hair of a turtle. It is not always the case that we have to know an object before we may make statements about it or attribute some property to it. A simple cognition, an error, a conceptual construction, or even a deliberate attempt at fiction, will be enough to justify our speech-acts about fictitious entities. And statements about fictitious entities like the rabbit’s horn, winged-horse may also serve some useful purpose in a logical discourse.”³⁰

There is some space for ‘unactualized-possibles’ in Buddhist and the Mīmāṃsā Schools. However, the Nyāya does not leave space for the empty terms such as “sky-flower” or “winged-horse” because of its position as a school

²⁹Matilal, B. K. (2005). *Epistemology, Logic and Grammar in Indian Philosophical Analysis*. edit. Jonardon Ganeri, New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 101-102.

³⁰Matilal, B. K. (2005). *Epistemology, Logic and Grammar in Indian Philosophical Analysis*. edit. Jonardon Ganeri, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 102.

representing realism. Unless there is a referent object, a term is non-significant for the Naiyāyikas.

While negating expressions such as ‘sky-flower’, ‘winged-horse’ etc., we are, in fact, denying their actuality is the position held by some of the Indian thinkers. These terms may have some usefulness any logical discourse. But, this is not the stated position of the Navya Nyāya. Matilal has put forward a strong argument against all those who argue for some space for such empty terms. However, in the case of the term ‘sky-flower’ being replaced with “round-square”, all the schools in one voice decline the possibility of such expressions even in distant future. I call them ‘illusory possibles’. The Navya Nyāya following Gāṅgeśa vehemently criticizes any role or significance for singular or general empty terms. And sentences which contain empty terms (empty expressions) equally find no place in either classical or the Navya Nyāya school.