

## **Nyaya Theory of Laksana: A Review**

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**Abstract:** *It is Known to us that the Naiyayikas have accepted four sources of valid knowledge or pramana which are perception, inference, analogy and verbal testimony. In the case of verbal testimony, knowledge of a pada becomes the instrumental cause ( karana ) of the comprehension of meaning. Generally it is said that the word or sentence of a trustworthy person is sabda. The recollection of the meaning of a term through the knowledge of that term is called vyapara. It is said that potency or sakti of a term is the medium which can help us to recollect the meaning of a term. But here some problems may be raised: What is sakti? Whether potency or sakti is the only medium which helps us to recollect the meaning of a term, or not? The Naiyayikas said that besides sakti, laksana also helps us to understand the meaning of a term. But again some questions may be asked: What is laksana? How many types of laksana we have to accept? Whether sakti and laksana are sufficient to understand the meaning of all terms, or not? In the present paper I shall explain the above problems from the standpoint of Nyaya philosophy. I shall also show here my departure from Nyaya philosophy.*

**Key words:** *verbal testimony, apta, sakti, laksana, vyanjana.*

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The statement of a trustworthy person is called sabda pramana. Sage Goutama defined verbal testimony as 'aptopodesah sabdah',<sup>1</sup> which means that the knowledge of a word or sentence comes from an apta or reliable person is called Sabda. Annambhatta said, "Aptavakyam sabdah".<sup>2</sup> According to Vatsyayana, word is that by which an object is spoken of or made known.<sup>3</sup> A trustworthy person is one who always speaks the truth. In other words, he always makes correct statement. "An apta is one who has direct or intuitive knowledge of things, who wishes to make known things as he has seen them and who is capable of speaking about them. And the word apta itself means one who operates through the direct or intuitive knowledge of things. This is a common characteristic of all aptas, whether they are sages, aryas or mlecchas."<sup>4</sup> A statement is a collection of significant words. A significant word has the power to signify something.

Here we should remember that there are different theories in Indian Philosophy about the relation between a word and its meaning. The Vaisesikas said that by inference of cause from effect, fire can be cognized from smoke. "Similarly, all cognitions are due to inference. There is no natural connection between word and meaning, but a conventional one that acts in the case of a particular word, just as causality directs the inference of fire from smoke."<sup>5</sup> The Naiyayikas, on the other hand, accepted sabda as a separate pramana.

According to the older school of Nyaya, the power of a word to convey its meaning comes from God's will that such or such a word is to signify such or such thing. But the Neo-Naiyayikas thought that this power may come from long established convention as well as an independent usage by an individual. According to the Naiyayikas, the signifying power is nothing but the relation between a word and its meaning. This relation exists between a word and its significance. The signifying power or sakti is not intrinsic in a word. It is extrinsic. It comes from outside and it is due to some convention. This convention is a desire of a conscious being. The desire is like this: such or such a word shall stand for such or such a thing. Generally the meaning-relation is based on God's desire. In some cases this relation may be based on human being. Thus the signifying power of a word is the desire of a conscious being. So it is a quality.

It is not right to say that any relation between a word and its meaning is the signifying power or sakti, because in that case there will arise the defect of over-coverage or ativyapti. There is a temporal relation between a word and its meaning, but this temporal relation is not signifying power. To avoid this difficulty it is said that sakti is the relation between a word with its meaning and this relation serves as the indirect determinant (prayojaka) of the remembrance of the signified entity. It is not possible for a person to understand the meaning of a word if he only knows the relation of the word with its meaning. He should also depend on the previous knowledge of that relation. 'Understanding' the meaning of a word is an instance of memory-cognition. Our memory about something depends on the previous knowledge of that thing. By a word a thing is indicated. If we have previous knowledge of a thing that is indicated by a term, only then we can remember the thing by that term. That means, our knowledge of a thing by a term depends not only on the relation between the term with its meaning, but also on the previous knowledge of that relation. So, sakti is the indirect determinant of the understanding or remembrance of what the word stands for.

The Naiyayikas say that a term signifies the particular as characterized by the class character. The Mimamsakas, on the other hand, say that a term directly signifies a universal or class-character. Mimamsakas say that by the term 'cat', at first we can understand 'cat-ness' and after that arises the knowledge of particular cat. They say that by the signifying power we can understand the universal and the knowledge of particular thing arises by implication or arthapatti. The Naiyayikas do not accept this view. They say that understanding the meaning of a term is a unitary thing. We cannot understand the meaning of such sentences like 'Bring a cow' etc. if we accept the Mimamsa view that by the signifying power we can understand the universal. If in the above case we can understand 'cow-ness' by the term 'cow', then the sentence will be meaningless. But if we understand the particular cow having the universal 'cow-ness', only then the sentence will be meaningful. Thus, the Naiyayikas said that by the signifying power of a term we can understand the particular qualified by the universal.

The Naiyayikas have accepted laksana or implicative meaning as a property of a term, like sakti. They say that like sakti, we can understand the meaning of a term by laksana also. The difference between sakti and laksana is that by sakti we can understand the meaning of a term directly, but with the help of laksana we can understand the meaning of a term indirectly. So, sakti is called 'direct signifying power' and laksana is called 'indirect signifying power'. "Indian philosophers (especially of the Nyaya school) give an account of this phenomenon by identifying two different 'powers' in a word: one is that of saying ( abhidhana) and the other is that of pointing, signifying or indicating ( laksana). The first is called the primary meaning-giving power while the second is called the secondary or indicatory meaning-giving power. By the first, the word speaks, as it were, while by the second it only indicates, and a metaphor is born." 6 Through the sakti of a term the understood meaning is called sakya. The Naiyayikas defined laksana as 'sakya-sambandha laksana'. 7 That means, laksana is the relation of a term with its sakya. Sakti helps us to understand the meaning of a term directly without the help of any other property, but laksana helps us to understand the meaning of a term with the help of what is signified by its sakti. Through laksana the understood meaning is called laksa. " The signifying power that is known as 'laksana' is indirect in as much as it is the relation of a term to something that in its turn has a close relation to the thing that is referred to by the 'power' that is 'sakti'. 8

Generally which is directly signified by a term is called 'sakyartha'. The occasional indirect meaning of a term is called 'laksartha'. Generally we can understand the meaning of a term used in a sentence by its sakti or direct signifying power. But in many cases it is not possible for us to understand the meaning of a term used in a sentence by its direct signifying power. In those cases if we accept the meaning which is directly signified by the term, then the sentences will be meaningless. That means, in many cases it is not possible for us to understand the meaning of a term used in a sentence by sakti or direct signifying power. Thus in such cases where we cannot understand the meaning of a term by sakti, there we should accept an indirect signifying power of the term which is called laksana. So, sometimes laksana help us to understand the meaning of a term used in a sentence. For example, "The milkmen's hamlet is in the Ganga." In the above sentence we can understand the meanings of all terms by direct signifying power or by sakti, except the term 'Ganga', because the direct signifying power of the term 'Ganga' is a river and milkmen's hamlet cannot be in a river. In this case the sentence will be meaningless. But actually the above sentence is not meaningless. So, here we have to accept the indirect meaning of the term 'Ganga'. The direct meaning of Ganga is a river which is called sakya. This sakya has a close relation with its bank, which is called laksa, and by laksana we can understand this laksa. The milkmen's colony is in the bank of Ganga. Thus, laksana helps us to understand the meaning of a term indirectly.

The Naiyayikas have accepted three types of laksana- jahal-laksana, ajhal-laksana and jahal-ajhal-laksana.

In some cases we reject the direct significance of a term totally and accept an indirect significance of it. This is called jahal-laksana. It is so called because here the indirect sense is wholly exclusive of the direct significance. For example, "The platforms are shouting." This sentence will be meaningless if we take the direct meaning of the term 'platform'. Directly the term 'platform' means 'stage' and as a stage is a lifeless entity, so it cannot shout. But the above sentence is not meaningless. The sentence will be meaningful if we take the indirect meaning of the term 'platform'. Here indirectly the term 'platform' means 'the persons who are standing on the stage' and who are closely related with stage. Now we can understand the meaning of the above sentence by taking this indirect meaning of the term 'platform'. This is jahal-laksana, because here the direct meaning of the term 'platform' is rejected totally and a new meaning is accepted.

When the direct meaning is not rejected and we take some other things with the direct meaning, then it is called ajhal-laksana. By ajhal-laksana we mean an indirect sense which is not wholly exclusive of the direct sense. In some cases we can understand the meaning of a term used in a sentence by taking some other things with the direct meaning. Such types of cases are called ajhal-laksana. For example, "People-with-umbrellas are going". Here the composite term 'people- with-umbrellas' is used in an indirect sense. The direct signifying power signifies the meaning of the term as 'a group of people who have umbrellas'. But the term is used here to

mean something more than the direct meaning of the term stated above. The actual meaning of the sentence is: A group of people are going most of whom have umbrellas. Here the direct meaning and the indirect meaning is taken together. The term 'people-with-umbrellas' signifies here the persons who have umbrellas and also the persons who have not umbrellas. Here the verb 'going' is connected not only with the persons who have umbrellas, but also with the persons who have not umbrellas.

In the case of jahat-ajahat-laksana the direct meaning of a term is partly accepted and partly rejected. This laksana helps us to understand the indirect meaning of a term by taking a part of the direct meaning and by rejecting a part of the direct meaning. In some cases if we accept the direct significance of a term totally, or if we reject the direct significance of the term totally, then the sentences will be meaningless. The Upanisadic dictum 'Tattvamasi' is an instance of such type of laksana. This sentence declares the identity of the finite soul with the infinite soul. Infinite soul is signified here by the direct sense of the term 'tat' or 'that' and finite soul is signified here by the direct sense of the term 'tvam' or 'thou'. If we accept these direct meanings of the terms, then the above sentence will be meaningless, because infinite spirit can never be identical with the finite spirit. To understand the meaning of the above sentence we should partly reject the direct meanings of the terms and we should partly accept the direct meanings of the terms. If we reject the two qualifications 'infinite' and 'finite' from the terms and take the other parts of the terms, only then we can understand the meaning of the above sentence. In that case both terms would signify consciousness or spirit. Then the equation 'That=Thou' or 'Tat=Tvam' becomes intelligible to us.

Thus, it is clear that in case of jahal-laksana, the direct meaning is totally rejected and in case of ajahal-laksana, the direct meaning is accepted with some other meanings. On the other hand, in case of jahal-ajahal-laksana, the direct sense of a term is partly accepted and partly rejected.

In conclusion, we can say that the Nyaya theory of laksana is useful even today. The three types of laksana help us to understand the indirect meaning of many terms. Here Mimamsakas point out Gaunivritti or figurative sense as a separate signifying power which is different from laksana. They say that there are some terms the meanings of which can be obtained indirectly, though there is no sakya-sambandha. For example, 'The young scholar is fire.' The sakti of the term 'fire' signifies 'a burning substance' which is sakya. The sentence will be meaningful if we accept the indirect sense of the term as 'purity' and 'brightness', though these are not related with the direct meaning of the term. As there is no sakya-sambandha, so, it is wrong to say that the above indirect meaning is understood by laksana. So, the Mimamsakas said that in such cases we should accept a new signifying power which is called gaunivritti or figurative sense. But the Naiyayikas said that such cases are also examples of laksana. Laksana may be immediate or mediate i.e. sakya-sambandha may be immediate or mediate. Naiyayikas said that in the cases of gaunivritti, laksana means mediate relation of a term with its sakya. In case of the above example, it can be said that purity, brightness etc. may present in a burning substance which are also the qualities of the scholar. Thus, it can be said that fire has some mediate relation with the scholar through these properties. This mediate relation is also nothing but laksana. I think that in case of gaunivritti, the opinion of Naiyayikas is acceptable.

But I think that only laksana is not sufficient to understand the indirect meaning of many terms. We should have to accept suggestive meaning or vyanjana also. The Naiyayikas do not accept vyanjana. To them it is nothing but extension of laksana. It is not acceptable to us because, vyanjana has got a completely different role in our day to day communication, which is not covered by mere implication. That is why, the role of suggestive meaning in literature or literacy form of art is accepted as inevitable. In fact, it is suggestion which takes a piece of writing to the level of creative writing (kavya). When it is said 'Lilakamalapatrani ganayamasa Parvati' i.e. Parvati easily counted the petals of the lotus, it gives rise to the meaning that Parvati became ashamed of hearing her own marriage talk. This understanding is not merely implicative, but more than this. Such understanding is possible, if we accept a separate category of meaning called vyanjana or dhvani. That which is not expressible through words or odd to express can easily be expressed through suggestion or dhvani which is not merely the extension of laksana.

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