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Studying Patanjali's idea of the Eternal Commonness as the Meaning

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Abstract: *Patanjali is considered one of the three pillars of Paninian school of Sanskrit grammar. It is also believed in Paninian school of Sanskrit grammar that Patanjali's interpretation of the aphorisms and other matters in grammar should be considered as final author. The Mahabhashyam of Patanjali states that the word, its meaning and the relation between the two, all are eternal. Patanjali tries to establish this, but, the questions of the opponent are also serious. So, he states that there are four types of meaning, i.e., shape or commonness, individuality, activity and arbitrariness. He argues that even though the individual meaning is not eternal, but, the commonness which prevails in all the individuals is eternal. A question arises here as to how the commonness can be eternal, if it prevails in the individuals who are not eternal. It is a clear gap. This paper is going to present the result of the study of this issue. As the study is based on the text of Mahabhashyam, the textual and hermeneutic approaches are being taken as the tools. Then, it is going to analyze the statement of Patanjali in the light of other phenomena, like extinct species, so comparative and analytical methods are also being employed here. The study shall take the arguments of Patanjali in original and analyze them in the light of complete extinction of many species which had commonness in their individual members and the concept of complete extinction of creation as taken by the philosophies. These concepts disprove the idea of eternal commonness. When eternal commonness is under interrogation, there is no possibility of eternal commonness to be the meaning of words.*

Key Words: *Commonness, Eternity, Eternity of commonness, Meaning of words.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Complete human behavior and the proper functioning of the society depend on the language. Along with this complete psychological development also depends on the language. Language is based on the relation between the words and their meanings. The same is true with all the languages. So, Sanskrit is also no exception to this law. As a result, the relation between the word and its meaning has been one of the very important subjects of discussion among the scholars of Sanskrit grammar since very ancient times. It is a fact of the history that ancient people believed in supernatural thing more people from almost all parts of the globe (whoever discussed this issue) had attached this matter with their gods or divinity. Divinity is believed to be permanent. So, ancient people attached permanence with almost all those things which were believed to be divine. The same happened with the interpretation of the idea of word and meaning in ancient India. Theorists of Mimansa tradition believed that the relation between word and meaning is permanent. Then, they expounded that the word and meaning are also permanent. They believe that the Vedas are not from any human being, because they are words and the words are eternal. Likewise, they advocate the eternity of meaning also. But it is difficult to accept that meaning is permanent, because things are subject to impermanence. So, to justify this idea they stated that the word does not denote individual entities of the target group of things. Rather, it denotes the commonness of all the member individuals and this commonness is eternal or permanent. The same belief was maintained by one of the three pillars of Paninian school of Sanskrit grammar, i.e., Patanjali. He asserted this view in the beginning of the *Mahabhashyam*. As the concept of eternal commonness is based on the impermanent individuals, it raises many questions which must be answered in proper way. If they are not answered in a proper manner, it would be very difficult to accept the idea of eternal commonness as the meaning of words.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

There has been a strong flow of grammatical writings before Patanjali also, but there found no description of such a theory which takes this subject into consideration. But, Patanjali offers a discussion on how eternity of word, meaning and their relation, and eternal commonness are required. Mimansa philosophy also holds that words denote eternal commonness, not merely impermanent individual items. After them, the author of Vakyapadiyam holds the same stand. Modern writers, like K. Kunjuni Raja, Kapildev Dvivedi etc. have simply presented the views of either Patanjali's Mahabhasyam or Bhartrihari's Vakyapadiyam.

3. Research Methodology: As the research is of textual and explanatory nature, textual and hermeneutic approaches shall be adopted. Likewise, analysis of the concept of permanent commonness is required to enter the depths of it, analytical method shall be employed.

Patanjali's position regarding the eternal commonness as the meaning of a word: While describing the relation between a word and its meaning, Patanjali states that word, its meaning and the relation between the two are eternal. It is being presented in his own words in the following translation of his text.

> With what meaning (genus or individuality) in mind, is the compound split thus sabde arthe sambandhe? 'Akriti' (genus), says he. Why so? For akriti is nitya and dravya is anitya. (Sastri 1944:55)
>
> No, it is nitya. How? Though it is not seen at one place, it does not fail to exist in all places; it is found in other objects (of the same genus). (Sastri 1944:56)
>
> Or it is not the definition of nitya – that which is free from sansarganityata, parinamanityata and pradhvansanityata, but that from which its inherent property is never severed is nitya. What is tattva? It-ness is tattva. The tattva is never separated from akriti. (Sastri 1944:57)

Patanjali's Arguments: On the basis of the above said, it can be said that central points of his arguments are the following ones.

1. Genus or commonness can be mental and it can also be a fact of outer world.
2. Genus or commonness is eternal or permanent.
3. If an item bearing it disappears, it shall be available in those items which belong to the same genus, but, they are available in some other place.
4. Inherent property of an item does not vanish. It is the eternity. According to Kapildev Dwivedi (Dwivedi 1951:205-206), Nageshabhatta explained it as eternity of flow.

4. Discussion

- **Genus or commonness as reality of Outer World or Existing in mortals and remaining eternal:** If it is said that the genus or commonness is a fact of outer world, it must exist in the individuals. But, no individual is eternal. Every individual is going to end. How can commonness be eternal when it depends on the impermanent individuals for its existence? To answer this question, Patanjali's standpoint is this that genus or commonness shall remain eternal, because it shall remain in the individuals who are present than the one which vanished. This argument can work in the belief that all the species shall remain without any danger. But, this is not the truth. It can be asked if the genus of particular individuals remain eternal, in case all the members of that group vanish. In such case, there is no way than accepting that commonness is also not an eternal thing. The following thoughts can throw more light on this matter.

1) **Exterminated Species of trees:** Many species of trees have completely vanished. Now, there is not a single example of that group. Researchers of botany found out the fossils of many species of trees which have completely been destroyed by different causes, like, fire of forest, changes in the climate and fall of meteoroids etc. now, those species of trees can't be found anywhere. In such case, it can't be an argument that the commonness would remain in some other individual members of that group, because no member of the group is existing.
2) **Extinction of Species of beings:** Many of the species of living beings had already been disappeared. For example, Dodo was a famous bird which was killed by the sea sailors for food and now, there is not a single Dodo in this world. Likewise, there were so many species of living beings whose fossils have been found out by researchers of zoology. So many species of dinosaurs were there on this earth. But, now, there is no dinosaur in the world. The fossils of so many species of the oceanic beings have been found out. Where is the commonness of genus of dinosaurs? What were their real names, as the new names are created by the scientists on the basis of different old and new European languages? So, it is not possible to accept that the meaning is eternal as a genus or commonness.
3) **Idea of Pralaya or the complete Extinction of world:** It can also be said that the modern scientific research was not available in the time of Patanjali, so he could not know that there was possibility of complete vanishing of a

species. But, it must not be out of the attention that almost all philosophers of ancient India believed in the pralaya or complete annihilation of the world. Almost all philosophies talk about the creation and destruction of the world. If it is mentioned by most of the philosophers that the pralaya shall definitely happen, how shall the same idea not be applicable to the word, meaning and their relation? Someone can say that so called God would create all the species of all beings and trees etc. in the new creation. So, the commonness would be eternal in this way. But, the commonness shall not come into being till the complete time of the state of pralaya. There shall be no possibility of the eternity of commonness for such a long time. How can anything be eternal which remains completely destructed for many trillions of years? In this situation, someone can state that the commonness of species of different beings and things shall be available in God's mind, because only he is responsible the complete creation. In that case also, it shall not be a real commonness. Rather, it shall be mere imagination. Then, the word genus means a group of some members. Likewise, commonness means something which is available in many individuals. But, in the period of godly destruction, there shall be no members of any group. As a result, there shall be no genus or commonness in the real sense of these words. Then, who knows that the so called God would not change his plan? If he makes some changes his plan, there shall be complete annihilation of the so called eternal commonness or genus.

- **Genus or commonness as mental reality or mental meaning of words:** If it is considered to be a mental reality or mental meaning of a word, it shall be in the minds of the speakers of the respective languages.
  1) But, there are cases in which all of the speakers of a particular language died. As a result, there is no way to the words of that language and to know which kind of picture of a particular group of items was there in the minds of those people.
  2) There is no clear information regarding which animals and trees etc. were available in a particular area about which they had the mental images.
  3) There is no way to know the mental level of those people whose complete community disappeared. Without knowing their mental level, it can't be understood about how many things and beings they had mental images.
  4) Many times, people migrate to some other areas. In such cases, they add many aspects to their knowledge of a particular group of items. So, their mental image of the same group of items changes and they become habitual of the new image.
  5) Sometimes, a community or a complete country is attacked by others who have some different understanding of the same group of items. Being rulers the new people impose their understanding on the people being ruled by them. In this way, the ruled people lose their mental image of the same group of items and they become habitual of the new image. In this way, it is not correct to say that genus or commonness is eternal as a mental image.
- **No loss of inherent property** – This speculation is based on the belief that there happens no change in the essence of the item, if some portion of it met with change. But, this belief itself is wrong.
  1) An item which has outer and inner aspects must be a composition and a composition must dissolve without any exception. Then, whatever change a composition goes through shall be definitely meet with the change completely.
  2) All properties depend on their bearers for their existence. For example, the inherent property of fire is its burning power which is always with fire. But, it can't be said that it is permanent, because the fire itself is not permanent. When fire is extinguished, where is the power of burning? If the power to burn is the inherent property of fire, it also disappears when fire disappears. It means that inherent property can't exist, in case the bearer of the property is destroyed. So, there is no possibility of eternity of the so-called inherent property.
  3) No property is something different from the so-called bearers. How can the power of burning be separated from the fire? If it is not possible not separate the so-called property from the so-called bearer, there is no ground to state that the inherent property is eternal. As a result, it can't be said that the eternity of inherent property is the eternity of commonness of genus as a meaning.
- **Eternity of flow** – Generally, flow seems to be eternal. But, it does not mean that it is really eternal.
  1) Every flow consists of many components. When something is made up with the components, it can't be eternal, because whatever components gather, they shall definitely scatter also. No one can tell any exception of this universal law. So. It is not the same thing, but continuous mixing of many items.
  2) Someone can say that the continuity of the flow it considered as the eternity of the flow. But, continuity of the flow is based on the continuous mixing of new items. Mixing of new items, i.e., momentary drops of water happens every moment in the continuity of flow. It means the mixings of momentary drops is the base of the eternity. It is not the same water. That is why, no one can step down in the same stream of water. In this form

of reality, where is the eternity? When there is no possibility of eternity of flow, there is no possibility of eternity of commonness.

3) In which way can the commonness be defined as a flow? Making statement is one thing, but providing the base for it is quite different thing. Commonness is something which is found in many members of the same group. For example, there are ten horses. The commonness or horse-ness is common in all the ten. So, it is not a flow, because the components give up their individual identity in a flow, as all drops of water give up their individual identity and produce the flow of water. But, in the commonness, all the components maintain their individual identity. So, it is wrong to mix up commonness with the flow.

5. Conclusion: This discussion proves that there is no possibility of eternity of commonness or genus, because all the arguments of Patanjali are not deep rooted. Commonness as an item of outer world can't be accepted, because not a single item is there in the outer world which can be eternal. As a mental image also, it could not pass the test of logic, because mental image depends mainly on the being that imagines it and that being is not eternal. As inherent property also it fails, because all properties, including inherent one, depend on their bearers. But the bearers are not permanent. As a flow also, commonness or genus could not pass the examination, because a flow can be only continuous and not eternal. Continuity is based on the changing parts of it. But, the same is not the case with eternity. So, it can be stated that there is no possibility of an eternal commonness or genus as the meaning of a word.

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