

### BOOK-REVIEW

MATILAL, BIMAL KRISHNA; *The Word and the World : India's Contribution to the Study of Language*; Oxford University Press, pp. ix+189, Rs. 175/- (HB)

This book by the late Prof. B. K. Matilal, the Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford, (See his Obituary in this issue elsewhere) consists of two parts: the first part deals with language theories in a general way and the second part in a more elaborate and critical way. It has three valuable appendices too. It is not simply an exposition but also a critical analysis of the classical theories of traditional grammarians (especially Bhartṛhari), aestheticians and philosophers in India on philosophy of language. The history of the development of the theories and critical evaluations are given, though very often it is left to us to decide which theory is correct and which is not. The aim of the author is to present the Indian language theories—theories selected by him—to the Western readers in the contemporary language idioms. The issues of traditional thought and arguments are presented as it is current in contemporary thought in the West. However, the background and the goals of traditional thought seem to be overlooked in the process.

Prof. Matilal is a scholar both of Indian and Western thought and a great sanskritist. He is capable of circumventing the defects of the traditional *pandits* and the modern scholars—the former not knowing the modern thought and the latter not knowing the traditional thought and Sanskrit language. Naturally we should expect a proper interaction between Indian and Western thought which co-exist in our country, though in many

places while discussing the issues the text and the context are not given for those who want to refer to them. The issues are selectively discussed by him. There is no paradigm which can hold all these theories together except that they are all theories of language.

All of us use language to convey ideas to others. How this communication takes place? What is the nature of language (ontology) and how do we communicate (epistemology)? These are the main issues discussed in these pages. Philosophy of language is an articulation of the intellectual form of our consciousness of the use of language. There are different articulations such as of the *Mīmāṃsakas*, *Naiyāyikas*, *Vaiyākaraṇas*, *Buddhists* and so on. All these schools have their own presuppositions which give sense to what they defend or give reasons for taking such and such positions. The presuppositions are not exposed in these essays and the author does not show any partiality to any theory to show its relative merits. Partiality is the strength of the critic. What shall we do when there are different theories of language? One must see which of the theories articulates one's own experience of language and show a partiality to defend it. Remember, we understand language irrespective of any of these theories of language. Moreover, even if one holds a wrong theory of language he will also understand the linguistic communication.

I am afraid that certain concepts of Bhartṛhari are taken in this work rather rigidly. According to Bhartṛhari the form of the word (the word in the intellect, universal) is the same as the form of the object. A word is applicable to reality as long as the identity of the form is felt and that is the reason for applying a word to an object. Therefore, whether you see one or many, or you see something changing, as long as the identity of the form of the word and the object is there you can mean the object by

the word. So, the objections of innumerability (*ananta*) and variability (*vyabhicāra*) are not valid (p. 37). The author also thinks that according to Bhartṛhari the so-called translation in the sense of 'transfer' of thought from one garb to another seems impossible (p. 122). Well, in VP II, 250-398 where Bhartṛhari deals with primary and secondary meanings, we can see ample room for change of word meaning and sentence-meaning even when he is holding *anekaśabdadarśana*. Any language can produce within its own system words with forms which have identity with all the objects which are to be referred. It depends on the *pratibhā* of the translator. The system of language and the unity of reality is in one to one relationship. When we have a word to refer to a reality that reality becomes an object. Prof. Matilal doubts the absolute relationship of language and thought (p. 128). Here he refers only to VP, I, 123-4. One must read from VP, I, 118-131. The relationship is absolute.

The *sphṛṭa* theory of Bhartṛhari is explained with text following the sequence of thought (p. 87-8). There is no substitute for the text to explain an issue. This is a model. Otherwise the author becomes the text and the text a context. We do not have proper presentation of Indian thought with intelligible texts as we have the Western thought in intelligible translations. In order to have proper understanding of Indian thought, the perspectives of which we should compare with Western thought in proper comparison and competition, we should always resort to texts. Prof. Matilal's exposition of Bhartṛhari's text in pp. 87-8 is a model on this count.

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## PROFESSOR B. K. MATILAL

We are sorry to report untimely sad demise of Prof. B. K. Matilal. Born in Jayanagar, Mazilpur (W. B.), India, in 1935 he was a Jubilee Scholar (1954-55) and winner of Hemachandra Goswami Prize and Gold Medal (1956). Later on he was a Harvard-Yenching Fellow (1962-64) and earned his M. A. and Ph. D. from Harvard in 1965. He commenced his teaching assignment in Toronto University, Canada, where he taught for twelve years. He also taught at Government Sanskrit College, Calcutta for five years, his last teaching assignment being Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford and Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. He was a Founder Editor of the Journal of Indian Philosophy (D. Reidel Pub. Co.) from the last twenty years. Recipient of Padmabhusana, he authored or edited such books as *Epistemology, Logic and Grammar in Indian Philosophical Analysis* (Mouton), *Logic, Language and Reality: An Introduction to Indian Philosophical Studies*, *Navya-nyāya Doctrine of Negation* (Harvard), *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge* (Oxford), *The Central Philosophy of Jainism* (LDI, Ahmedabad), *Moral Dilemmas in the Mahābhārata* (Delhi) etc, and contributed number of papers to journals and conferences. He not only contributed himself to the investigation into various trends of Indian philosophical origin but also encouraged young scholars from India and abroad to do so. In his passing away we have unfortunately and untimely lost a sustained researcher, a dedicated teacher and a well-known editor.

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