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## DIÑNĀGA'S PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

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**Abstract:** In this research paper, I have attempted to examine the aspects of Apoha theory to understand Diñnāga's philosophy of Language. I have made a philosophical investigation to understand how Diñnāga explains the role of Apoha theory in analyzing the philosophical thoughts of Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu theories of Śabdārtha and Arthabodha. This proposed research work is an attempt to understand the concept of Śabdārtha and Sabdabodha, Diñnāga concept of Arthabodha and Śabdārtha and his contribution to the Buddhist philosophy of language.

**Keywords:** Diñnāga, Nāgārjuna, Language, Vasubandhu, Śabdārtha, Arthabodha, Apoha, Śabda, Buddhism, Vyavrtti, Śabdabodha

### Introduction

Diñnāga is one of the most important Buddhist philosophers and his contribution in philosophy of language has given different directions and turns to the Buddhist philosophy of language. Being a follower of philosophical thoughts of Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu, Diñnāga gave importance to Śabdārtha and Arthabodha to understand and analyze the philosophy of language in order to know the relation between knowledge, language and reality. Both Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu deny the view that the words in our language refer to reality. This is because for Nāgārjuna the ultimate reality is made up of discrete, unique particulars. The language is not able to apprehend the discrete, unique particular nature of the object. So Nāgārjuna's in relation to language he talks about the relation between language and reality. Vasubandhu believed that language does not apprehend reality because language is created by consciousness and consciousness is rooted in human nature. Vasubandhu apprehended the relation between language and knowledge. Infact, when we consider language as an important medium of communication, it is necessary to explore the relation of language with reality and to apprehend the relation of language with knowledge. This is because the use and nature of language is based on understanding these relationships (language, knowledge and reality). While understanding the Indian philosophy of language, it seems that the Nāgārjuna give importance to Śabdārtha and Vasubandhu gave importance to Arthabodha or Sabdabodha to understand the nature of language.

Here the problem arises, how the importance of Śabdārtha and Artabodha is related to the Buddhist philosophy of language. Here Diñnāga gives importance to both Śabdārtha and Arthabodha by following the philosophy of Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu.

As we know that Diñnāga accepted the reality of discrete unique particular and by referring to the theory of Apoha, he wanted to claim that there is a possibility of referring the reality, by Śabda. For Diñnāga, the meaning of Śabda is Vyavrtti, he further said that this meaning of Śabda is cognized by Apoha. Here, we can see that the Diñnāga's aim to establish the relation of language with reality as well as to relate the language with knowledge. So with the theory of Apoha, he supported Śabdārtha and Arthabodha. So in this research paper, I have attempted to inquire and examine the aspects of Apoha theory to understand Diñnāga's philosophy of language.

### Concepts of Śabdārtha and Śabdabodha

The term Śabda is interpreted differently by different philosopher in Indian philosophy of language:

1. Sabda in wider sense refers to any kind of Dhvanī which is cognized by the auditory sense organ.
2. Śabda refers to word or Pada that signifies the object in a restricted sense.
3. Śabda also means Āptavākya or a sentence spoken by a reliable person.

Śabdārtha means Artha of Śabda or meaning of word. Here meaning means the object that is denoted by the word. Word denotes the object because it has potency (Vṛtti). Śabda means cognition which is caused by word. Cognition of the meaning of the word is dependent on the cognition of the meaning of the other words. Śabdabodha presupposes a cognitive process. This cognitive process is of two types: Analysis and Synthesis. When an individual hears the word then he tries to understand the meaning by analyzing different actual and possible meanings of the words and then comes to the conclusion of the specific meaning of the word by excluding other meanings of the word. This specific meaning of the word is cognized by intuition or in terms of Bhartrhari by Pratibhā. For example, the meaning of a cow is cognized by analyzing and eliminating other possible meanings like not being horse, cat or lion etc.

On the otherhand, when the word is heard the individual tries to understand the meaning of the word by synthesizing different meanings of the word. When we cognize the meaning of the word by synthesis, we do not get its unique meaning but we get its general



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meaning. For example, meaning of cow is cognized by synthesizing its different meanings, for example, meaning of cow is cognized by synthesizing its various attributes like, cow is an animal, it gives milk. Thus, Śabdārtha and Arthabodha are two distinct concepts. Śabdārtha talks about the relation between word and object and Śabdabodha talks about the relation between word and knowledge of its meaning.

### Diñnāga concept on Śabdārtha

For Diñnāga, there are two objects of knowledge in the world, namely, Svalakṣaṇa and Sāmānya Lakṣaṇa. Svalakṣaṇa refers to unique, discrete particular. This unique particular is of five kinds: smell, taste, touch, sound and sight. These unique particulars do not form object independently but they form the object when they come together. It is because according to Diñnāga, it is an aggregation of all these Svalakṣanas. Diñnāga said that Svalakṣanas are real in true sense of the term and ultimate reality or Parmārtha Sat is made of these Svalakṣanas. Sāmānyalakṣaṇa refers the common, general properties that we find between and among different individuals. It is a linguistic construction, where language is based on the relation between Viśeṣaṇa and Viśeṣya. Viśeṣaṇa tell us something about the object. It informs about the object that it has something which is not built into the object rather the knower has either imposed certain attribution on the object. So, we can say that Viśeṣaṇa as linguistic construction related with objects. Dharmakīrti said that these linguistic constructions are determined and these are governed by social and cultural norms. With the help of nāma, jāti, guna, kriyā, dravya we communicate our thoughts and feelings but they do not refer to reality necessarily because reality is made up of unique particulars and nature of these kinds of language refers only to generality and hence language is unable to capture the unique particulars.

Now the problem is, the language does not represent the particularity is accepted but does it represent common and shareable features? Diñnāga does not answer this question positively. For him, just like Svalakṣaṇas, Sāmānya-lakṣaṇas are also infinite in number. So it is not possible for us to capture the common shareable properties of the object through language. While talking about nama, Jati, Guns etc, it means that the same object or an individual can be described in five different ways. Although Language represents shareability, it cannot represent all kinds of share-ability or shareable properties simultaneously. While explaining about the limitation of language, Diñnāga said that there are various characteristics of objects and they are intermingled to each other in such a way that it is not possible for us to choose a single word either to represents or to denote the object with all its qualities. Now gain the problem arise that what does word signify, if it does not signify the generality or particularity? For Diñnāga word signifies Anyavyāvṛtti because word means Apoha. Word has potency to refer to the Vyāvṛtti between objects. It is consistent with his metaphysical theory. The generality is not built into the object rather it is conceptual and linguistic in character. So, we can say that in Diñnāga's philosophy of language, Śabdārtha is the relation between word-world is not that of one-to-one correspondence. Now the problem is, if a single word in our language does not either depict the particularity or universality then how is it possible to cognize the object by word? How is Arthabodha possible in Diñnāga's philosophy of language?

### Diñnāga concept on Arthabodha

For above discussion, we can see that for Diñnāga there are infinite particulars and infinite universals. So now the question is how to know the meaning of word? In order to explain his points, Diñnāga used the concept of Apoha to answer this question. Apoha in literal sense mean the exclusion of others, where we exclude something from something. It means exclusion needs two elements: the element which is excluded and the element from which it is excluded. The nature of these elements is different from each other and this the reason why one object is excluded from the given object. It can also understand as the process of elimination. Diñnāga explains that in this process of elimination, eliminates those kinds of object or qualities of the object which are dissimilar attributes of the object from the given attributes of the object. There are three kinds of objects which are excluded from the given object. Firstly, the objects which are dissimilar to and other than given object are excluded. Secondly, the objects which are Avyāpta or less in number are excluded and thirdly the objects which are Ativyāpta or the greater in number are excluded.

### The Role of Apoha in Arthabodha

As discussed above, for Diñnāga when the object is known by word, it is known to us only by eliminating the other words which are supposed to be used to refer to the properties of the object. This process is similar to the process that happens with Svārthānumāna. As for example, with the presence of smoke, we infer that there is fire on the mountain. Here the mountain is Dharmī and fire and smoke are its Dharmas. These two Dharmas are related to each other in such a way that if there is smoke there is fire. Hence, when we find the presence of fire on the mountains, we eliminate those places where we find the presence of fire and smoke and also those places where we find the absence of fire and smoke. Apart from this we know that the fire on the mountain has n-number of properties like color temperature, smell etc however we know the fire on the mountain by eliminating all these properties of the fire.

Now again the problem is it is accepted that by word fire we do not know its color, temperature, etc but we know fire in general but what about the word blue lotus? Diñnāga said that after uttering the complete word blue lotus, we know what is blue lotus and not



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by the utterance of the independent words. In this example the word blue is quality name while lotus is a general name. The other qualities like green, white, red etc are excluded from blue and other objects like table, chair, pot etc are excluded from lotus. So, in this way Dinnāga said that that when we know the object by word, we know it through the process of exclusion or elimination. Dinnāga believed that in this way the principle of Apoha help us to elaborate the nature of the knowing process that happens what we get the information through words.

In Dinnāga's philosophy of language, the roles of Śabdārtha and Arthabodha, we find that that by believing in the reality of unique particulars Dinnāga has rejected the one-to-one correspondence between word and world and between word and knowledge. In this way, Dinnāga followed a middle path between the reciprocal and shared relation between Śabdārtha and Arthabodha on one hand and no relation between Śabdārtha and Arthabodha on another hand. This contribution of Dinnāga gave a new turn to Indian philosophy of language.

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