Pāṇinian Theory of *guṇasamudāya*

—Indian Cluster Theory—

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In the second chapter of his *Vākyapadīya* (VP), Bhartṛhari, a grammarian of the Pāṇini school, enumerates various views on what the meaning (*artha*) of a term is. We can find, among them, the following:

samudāya (collection) except *vikalpa* and *samuccaya*¹⁾ is what is denoted by a word. (VP 2-126²⁾ ab)

This *samudāya* is often identified with *guṇasamudāya* (collection of properties). The *guṇa* (property) in this case is as follows:

Whatever is understood to be connected with something, to differentiate it and to have function is called 'property' (*guṇa*) in the *śāstra* because it is dependent upon another. (VP 3-5-1)

Therefore it includes 'essential property as a whole' (*jāti*) and 'act' (*kriyā*). To describe a property of a thing is to express the thing in a certain manner. We do this by means of a description. According to some modern philosophers, the sense of a term is given by descriptions associated with the term. However, if only one description counts, several objections can be raised to the theory. They are as follows³⁾:

- (1) People may associate not one but many descriptions with a term. Which of them, in that case, gives the sense of the term? It seems impossible to correctly answer this question.
- (2) The description associated with a term by one user is not always important for all users.
- (3) If the sense of the description 'The greatest philosopher of the Advaita school' were equal to that of the name 'Śaṅkara', the expression 'Śaṅkara is the greatest philosopher of the Advaita school' would lead to tautology.

The modern description theory⁴⁾, taking account of these objections, states that the sense of a term is given not by one description but by a cluster of descriptions. According to this view, a term is *loosely* combined with many descriptions. They need not be exactly the same among users of the term. In other words, every member of the collection of properties the descriptions describe need not belong to any particular individual the term refers to. According to the *guṇasamudāya* theory, on the other hand, a term does not necessarily means all the properties expressible by it. That is the reason why I refer to the *guṇasamudāya* theory as the 'Indian cluster theory'.

My aim in this paper is to make clear the context in which the *guṇasamudāya* theory is presented and reply to the question of whether the anti-descriptivists' criticism of the cluster theory is valid for the former.

The *guṇasamudāya* theory is discussed in two places in the *Mahābhāṣya* (MBh) of Patañjali, from which many topics of VP are derived.

First we focus on the place in which the theory is presented in relation to Patañjali's explanation of the suffix '-vati'. The sūtra of Pāṇini on which he comments is '*tena tulyaṁ kriyā ced vatih*' (5-1-115).

One example of the application of this rule is '*brāhmaṇena tulyam adhite*' = '*brāhmaṇavad adhite*' (He studies like a Brahmin). One question arises here. Does the '*kriyā*' in that sūtra qualify the meaning of *prakṛti* (base) ('*brāhmaṇa*' in the above example '*brāhmaṇavat*') or the meaning of *pratyaya* (affix) ('-vat' in '*brāhmaṇavat*')? If it qualifies the former, the said sūtra means 'If the nominal base semantically connected with the third case-affix means "act", the affix "-vat" in the senses of similarity is appended to it.' The problem is, however, that the nominal base which mentions *kriyā* (act) cannot be semantically connected with the third (i.e. instrumental) case-affix (*tṛtīyā*).

Patañjali says,

If the phrase 'If *kriyā* is semantically connected with the third case-affix' is supplied here, how can (the nominal base which mentions) *kriyā* be semantically connected with the third case-affix? ⁵⁾

Bhartṛhari comments on this part in *VP* as follows :

The third case-affix is appended to the nominal base which denotes *sattva* in the sense of relations other than those between acts and direct participants in acts (*kāraka*) or in the sense of *sādhana* (= *kāraka*). Since the word which ends in *tiñ* (personal ending) denotes *asattva*, neither of those senses is present there. (In the same way the nominal base which means *kriyā* is not semantically connected with the third case-affix because it denotes *asattva*.)⁶⁾ (*VP* 3-14-435)

To solve that problem, Patañjali presents the *guṇasamudāya* theory in *MBh* as follows :

This difficulty does not arise. All these words '*brāhmaṇaḥ*', '*kṣatriyaḥ*', '*vaiśyaḥ*', '*śūdraḥ*' mean collections of properties.⁷⁾

And he cites one verse and comments on it.

'Religious austerity, learning and birth, these make him a Brahmin. He who does not have religious austerity and learning is a Brahmin only by birth (i.e. only by caste).' In the same way properties such as 'having a fair skin', 'clean-living', and 'brown-haired' are included in the properties of being a Brahmin. And the word which means a whole means its parts also. For example : '*pūrve pañcalāḥ*' (East Pañcāla), '*uttare pañcalāḥ*' (North Pañcāla), '*tailaṃ bhuktam*' (the oil has been eaten), '*ghṛtaṃ bhuktam*' (the ghee has been eaten), '*śuklāḥ*' (white), '*nilāḥ*' (blue), '*kṛṣṇāḥ*' (black). In the same way the word '*brāhmaṇa*' which means a whole means its parts also.⁸⁾

On this line of reasoning, the word '*brāhmaṇa*' secondarily mentions act (*kriyā*) because it means 'learning', a part of the collection of properties of a Brahmin. Therefore, it becomes possible to hold the view that the word '*kriyā*' in the said sūtra qualifies *prakṛti*.⁹⁾

Bhartṛhari relates the *guṇasamudāya* theory to his ideational theory of meaning.¹⁰⁾

Hearers get the images determined by the associated meanings. Therefore people know they are the meaning of a word.

In those images, all the helpful things are connected with each other. They all, in the form of the images, becomes the meaning of a word. The form of mere beings (having neither *jāti* nor *guṇa*) is not determined. A word does not mean something the form of which is not determined. (3-14-472~474)

Words like '*brāhmaṇa*' generally mean that which manifests *jāti*, that which is invariably associated with some act, and that which is usually regarded as conventionally connected with *jāti*¹¹⁾ when it does not matter whether their users intend the collection of properties or part of them. (3-14-481~482)

Now it is to be noted that this *guṇasamudāya* theory is presented, in this case, in order to explain the *upamā* (comparison) relation, as is shown by the sentence '*brāhmaṇavad adhite kṣatriyaḥ*' (A Kṣatriya learns like a Brahmin) in which a Brahmin is the standard of comparison (*upamāna*) and a Kṣatriya is the object of the comparison (*upameya*). We make use of the comparison when we recognise any similarity between the two. The similarity is, in the above example, the act of learning. Now we shall turn to the other place¹²⁾ of *MBh* in which the *guṇasamudāya* theory is advocated.

Patañjali suggests the *guṇasamudāya* theory to answer the question of how the word '*a-brāhmaṇa*' refers to a Kṣatriya. The reply is as follows: In the word '*a-brāhmaṇa*', '*-brāhmaṇa*' means part of the collection of properties a Brahmin has and, on the other hand, '*a-*' denies that the object referred to by the word has the rest of the collection of properties. This discussion, at a glance, might seem to have nothing to do with the comparison mentioned above. In fact, however, it is in the same line. '*a-brāhmaṇa*' refers to a Ksatriya because there is some similarity between Brahmin and Kṣatriya. '*a-brāhmaṇa*' cannot refer to all things outside of a Brahmin. It refers to one which differs from a Brahmin but nevertheless has some similarity to it. The meaning of a negative particle like the '*a-*' of '*a-brāhmaṇa*' is interpreted as *paryudāsa* whose function is to manifest something similar as the result of the negation. Thus in the case of '*a-brāhmaṇa*' also, Patañjali advocates the *guṇasamudāya* theory in the context of the comparison.¹³⁾

To summarize, one of the most important objections to the cluster theory is that we can appropriately use a word to refer to its object, even when we are ignorant of the properties the object has.¹⁴⁾ If the *guṇasamudāya* theory is regarded as a exhaustive theory of meaning, the objection

to the cluster theory is valid for it also. However, as we have indicated above, the *guṇasamudāya* theory is advocated only in the context of *upamā* (comparison). A speaker, having in mind some similarity e.g. between Brahmin and Kṣatriya, makes a comparison and use the word '*brāhmaṇa*'. Therefore, the *guṇasamudāya* theory does not assert that the descriptions which describe the similarity give the sense which *directly* determines the referent of the word. In addition, the similarity is supposed to be widely known, otherwise the comparison would not be successful.

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- 1) *vikalpa* (option) is stated by '*vā*' and *samuccaya* is one of the meanings of '*ca*'. For details on the latter, see *MBh* on 2-2-29; *VP* 3-14-471.
 - 2) Verses refs. are to S. Iyer's edition (Poona: Deccan College, 1973).
 - 3) For more details on this matter, see S. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980, pp. 79-91. Here I am indebted to M. Devitt & K. Sterelny's *Language & Reality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 39-49, 67-70.
 - 4) cf. J. Searl, 'Proper Names', *Mind*, 67, 1958, pp. 166-173. The cluster theory can also be advocated in the case of terms other than proper names.
 - 5) *MBh* (ed. by F. Kielhorn, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute) II, p. 363, ll. 11-12.
 - 6) This '*sattva*' is supposed to mean *dravya* (substance).
 - 7) *MBh* II, p. 363, ll. 12-13.
 - 8) *MBh* II, p. 363, ll. 14-19. cf. *VP* 3-14-474~480, 484~488.
 - 9) cf. *VP* 3-14-447.
 - 10) cf. TANIZAWA Junzō, 'Indo Bupōgakuha ni okeru Imi no Modai' [in Japanese] (The Problem of Meaning for Indian Grammarians), *Tōhōgaku* 77, 1989, pp. 128-118.
 - 11) cf. Helārāja's commentary on these verses.
 - 12) *MBh* I, p. 411.
 - 13) For more details on the meaning of the negative particle, see TANIZAWA Junzō. 'Indo Bupōgakuha ni okeru Hitei no Imiron' [in Japanese] (Indian Grammarians' Theory of Meaning with regard to Negation), *Bukkyō Bunka*, Scientific Special Number 3, 1987, pp. 69-91.
 - 14) cf. M. Devitt & K. Sterelny, *Language & Reality*, pp. 47-48.
- 〈Key Words〉 *guṇasamudāya*, cluster theory, *upamā*, *upamāna*, *upameya*
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