

Nagarjuna and Later Wittgenstein: A Comparative Analysis of the Relation Between Language and Reality

Niranjan Adhikary¹

Abstract

The main strategy of this paper is to make a comparative analysis of the relationship between Later Wittgenstein and Nagarjuna concerning language and reality. Even though the appearance of Wittgenstein and Nagarjuna is quite different in time, and one was doing systematic philosophy within the womb of Western tradition, unlike the other, a careful outlook would reflect that their philosophical thinking had proximity to each other. In this short and brief paper, an attempt will be made to show in what sense their philosophical thinking comes together. It seems that both of them prefer ordinary language under the womb of the conventional philosophical system. As a result of that, the impact of their philosophical thinking is noteworthy. Wittgenstein and Nagarjuna deny the relevance of canonical language based on the ontological foundation and logical principles. Later Wittgenstein's idea to cognize reality through ordinary language is very similar to that of Nagarjuna's concept of reality. Their way of dealing with language was very proximate in manner. The conclusion of this paper consists of a critical analysis of the philosophical implications of Wittgenstein and Nagarjuna, not only by way of showing the meeting point between them but also by explicating their philosophical impact on other theories as well.

Keywords: language, reality, language-game, conventional world, form of life, ordinary language

¹ Currently working as an Assistant Professor in Philosophy at Seth Soorajmull Jalan Girls' College, niranjan.adhikary95slg@gmail.com

1. Introduction

If philosophy insists on formulating the nature of the world, then without language, it is very hard to find an alternative way to formulate everything about the world. It is to be said that no thinking is possible without language. If so, then the ideas we collect from the world will remain unrecognizable without language. Whatever we claim as a piece of knowledge is only the ideas of objects. The basic functionality of sensory stimulation is to collect information from sensory objects, and by organizing that information, our mind formulates the shape of an idea. The idea, therefore, is indeed inexpressible without language. So, when we talk about a fact of the world, we make a relationship between language and the world. Hence, it can be claimed without a doubt that philosophy is nothing but the analysis of language.

However, while we are dealing with language and reality, we can begin our discussion by raising the question: What is a language? What is the relationship between language and the world? Whether the world represented by language relative or fixed? By language, simply we can pronounce that *language is a collection of meaningful propositions* (grammatically structured) that act as a medium to share ideas or knowledge about an object or entity. Moreover, successful communication between a speaker and a hearer is made possible only with the help of language.

Now, the key question is: what kind of language is required to establish a relationship between language and the world? However, there is not a single form of language. Language has different forms. Particularly, in the philosophy of language, two different forms of language have emerged over time: formal/artificial or ordinary/everyday language. Some philosophers like Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein went in favour of artificial language or formal language. On the other hand, some philosophers like Later Wittgenstein, Strawson, and William Jems were in favour of ordinary language. L. Wittgenstein (1956) in his seminal work *Philosophical Investigations* signified that ‘language is an important tool of our ordinary or everyday life’. Whatever we express with the help of language becomes part of our reality. When someone pronounces that “there is a black cat”, they express the knowledge about the cat, and the cat is a part of our reality. Therefore, reality is reflected in language and vice versa. Therefore, there is an integral relationship between a language and the world.

Amazingly, it is not the case that language is used as a tool in the Western philosophical tradition to explain the nature of the world, but also prominently used in Indian Philosophy, for example, we can count here Nyaya and Buddhist philosophy.

However, this article is constructed to discuss and analyze Nagarjuna's and Later Wittgenstein's views on language and its relationship with reality. Both of them subscribed to a systematic analysis of language and its importance in expressing reality. Though the appearances of Nagarjuna and Wittgenstein are quite different by time and region, careful studies or observations of them and their philosophical understanding make them related to each other.

Over the years, many scholars from East to West have been working on the relationship between language and reality. The role of language became more prominent in philosophical tradition after the emergence of analytic philosophy. In contemporary analytic philosophy, most of the analytic philosophers were concerned with some meta-metaphysical issues, such as issues on reality, language, and the relation between reality and human conception. The "analytical turn" in twentieth-century philosophy brought a revolution in the field of metaphysics, epistemology, and logic. It is suggested that all philosophical problems are rooted in the misinterpretation of language. To solve these philosophical problems concerning reality, we need to reinterpret our language in a constructive logical way. Therefore, analytic philosophers adopted language as a method or means or way to know the world or conceive the world. For them, the world is a linguistic construction. They used language as a means to solve all philosophical questions and problems that arise in metaphysics, epistemology, and logic.

This article is composed of four sections. The first section is introductory; section two is dedicated to analysing Nagarjuna's viewpoint on language and reality; section three involves Wittgenstein's conception of language and reality; the fourth section is a comparative outlook on the shared similarities between Nagarjuna and Wittgenstein.

2. Nagarjuna on Language and Reality

To begin with, it needs to be remarked that at the present philosophical era, scholars from all over the world are taking an interest in Buddhist philosophy, especially Nagarjuna's theory of

*Sunyavāda*² or *Mādhyamika philosophy*. Nagarjuna was a well-named Buddhist philosopher and thinker, also known as the second Buddha. He was the founder of Mādhyamika Buddhism or *Sunyavāda*. His *Sunyavāda* (theory of emptiness) was later introduced in China by Kumarajiva, approximately in the first half of the fourth century A.D.³

To talk about the development of Madhyamika philosophy, Prof. T. R. V. Murti (Chetry, 2017) remarked that there are three or four stages in Mādhyamika Buddhism. The first stage of Mādhyamika philosophy (as Prof. Murti is concerned) was developed by Nagarjuna's immediate disciple Aryadeva. The second stage is divided into two different stages: the Prāsangika and the Svātāntrika, represented by Buddha Pālita and Bhāvaviveka, respectively. The last stage has been represented by *Santāraṅgita* and *Kumārśīlā*.⁴

However, Nagarjuna is considered the most important scholar in Buddhism. Some of his scholarly works include: 1. *Mulamādhyamaka Kārikas*, 2. *Sunyata Sapati*, 3. *Vigrahavyāvartani*, 4. *Yukti Sakti*.⁵ Though several books were authored by Nagarjuna, the central theme of his writing is grounded on the theory called '*Sunyavāda*' (theory of emptiness). The fundamental thesis of Nagarjuna, i.e., *emptiness*, is the core of his philosophical, metaphysical, and ethical discourse. Before discussing the main objective of this discussion, it is to be pointed out that many scholars have confused the term "emptiness" with "nihilism". This confusion can be caused by others. The term "*sunya*" or "emptiness" is not identical to the term nihilism. Nihilism is the complete denial of any existence. It is void in nature. On the other hand, the term "*sunya*" signifies reality as something that cannot be counted as either existent or non-existent.

However, the question can be put forward: why did Nagarjuna exemplify that the reality is "*sunya*" or "empty"? Looking forward to the answer to this question, we have to dive into the Buddhist core principles⁶. The core principles of Buddhist philosophy provide the backbone of

² Sunyavada or emptiness is the fundamental theory of Buddhism. Their metaphysical understanding of reality leads them to accept Sunyavada. This theory is a middle-way interpretation of reality that claims that reality is something that cannot be either true or false.

³ Cheng, Hsueh-Li (1981). "Nagarjuna, Kant and Wittgenstein: The San-Lun Mādhyamika Exposition of Emptiness" in *Religious Studies*, vol.17. Cambridge University Press, pp. 67

⁴Chetry, S (2017), *Status of External world in Buddhist Philosophy: A Study*, Gauhati University (submission 2017), pp. 86

⁵ Ibid, pp.87

⁶ The core principles of Buddhism include Pratityasamutpada, Ksanikatavada, Anatmavada, etc See also *An Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy (2008)* by Stephen J. Laumakis.

Nagarjuna's sunyavada. Nagarjuna's concept of "sunya" or "empty" concerning the nature of reality is derived from the theory of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and the theory of momentariness (*ksanikatvavada*). Sunya signifies neither existence nor non-existence. The term 'existence' as Nagarjuna conceived is something that qualifies an object which is independent in itself. Nagarjuna considered that if anything exists, it must be independent. Independent quality of existence in Nagarjuna's philosophy is coined with the term 'svabhava' (we will come back later). But according to Buddhist philosophy, everything in this world depends on others for its existence. Considering this sense in mind, his theory of reality somehow becomes relative. That is to say that reality is relative because there is no independent origin or existence of anything else.

It is to be noted that relativity is the true essence of Mādhyamika philosophy. If we put forward the question to them: What is the world or reality? They will reply, 'the world of reality (conceivable reality or the reality formulated in language) is the totality of relations'. Nagarjuna stated that relations of this world cannot be manifested or established; it is unintelligible. And, therefore, the world is *sunya* or empty.

Mādhyamik philosophy is sometimes identified as the philosophy of criticism because of its metaphysical nature and standpoint. Some scholars have proposed that Madhyamik philosophy only criticizes other theories, but does not provide any philosophical standpoint concerning these ontological issues. Moreover, this theory also stands against absolutism. The theory of absolutism conceives reality in terms of its absolute existence. According to this theory, reality exists without depending on others. Opposed to this theory, Nagarjuna profounded that everything depends on others for its existence. So, the ontological status of a being is relative. Why is everything relative? In our day-to-day lives, we identify an object. For example, the table, chair, etc., which are the observable objects, are part of reality, and we can identify these objects in the same way as I had perceived before. Buddhist philosophers did not accept reality as something unchanged. According to them, reality is momentary (*kṣanik*), and therefore, nothing can be counted as permanent in this world. Interestingly, the paradox of reality is that though the objects in this world are not permanent, we recognize these objects as permanent. But, the essence of Buddhism lies within the assertion 'Nothing is permanent, everything in this world is relative by its nature'. In the absolute sense, reality does not exist, but in the relative sense, reality exists as a purpose of practical utility. That is why Nagarjuna's

Sunyavāda, or theory of momentariness known as a middle way. The question can be further raised that: What is the nature of *Sunyatva*? Nagarjuna remarked that though *sunyatva* denied the self-nature of all existing beings, it doesn't mean that *sunyatva* is something positive. If anything in the external is considered as *sunyatva*, *sunyatva* would have been there. So, *sunyatva* lacks its existence.⁷

Now, let's come back to explain Nagarjuna's views on the nature of reality and its relation with language. It has already been pointed out that reality in Mādhyamika philosophy means a collection of relations and nothing else, and the relations among objects or entities are unintelligible. To deal with Nagarjuna's view on reality and its relation with language, it is a basic requirement to discuss the nature of existence in terms of Nagarjuna's standpoint. Existence can be defined here in terms of *dharma*. The term "*dharma*" can be further categorized by the term *Svabhāva* (Intrinsic nature). Westerhoff (2009, pp.19), to talk about *Svabhāva*, propounded that 'this is the central conceptual point of Nagarjuna's Madhyamika'.⁸ The term "*Svabhāva*" can be translated as "inherent existence" or "own existence". Now, the key question raised: when does an entity become an existence? Or, what does it mean by inherent existence? Westerhoff quoted:

"...it denotes a feature by feature by which a particular phenomenon is to be individuated, thereby rendering it knowable and nameable. This understanding of *avabhava* is made more precise by the Sarvastivadins' identification of *Svabhāva* and *svalakṣana*, the specific quality that is unique to the object characterized and therefore allows us to distinguish it from other objects."⁹

Therefore, *Svabhāva* can be understood in terms of the unique quality of being. The *Svabhāva* implies the independent existence of a being or entity. According to Buddhism, the term "*svabhāva*" cannot apply to the object of our cognizable world because of their dependency on others.

However, Nagarjuna divided the world into two types: the conventional world (*samvriti-Satya*) and the actual world (*pāramārthika-Satya*). For him, the actual world (real world) is inexpressible by language. The *Pāramārthika Satya* of reality is its *Svabhāva* (own being), and

⁷ Ibid, pp.116

⁸ Westerhoff, J. (2009). Nagarjuna's Mādhyamika. UK: Oxford University Press, pp. 9-12.

⁹ Ibid, pp.20-46

samvriti-Satya of reality is *pratyaya* (relational condition). Nagarjuna remarked that both are incompatible with each other. In the second part of his work, *Mulamadhyamakakarika*, he defined *svabhāba* as:

“*Na sambhāvaḥ Svabhāvasya yuktaḥ pratyā-hetubbiḥ, hetu-pratyaya-sambhutaḥ svabhāba kritako bhavet*”.¹⁰

This verse translates as:

“The occurrence of self-nature through causes and conditions is not proper. Self-nature that has occurred as a result of causes and conditions would be something that is made.”¹¹

So, the conditional nature of reality as we conceive it is not the real nature of reality. As Nagarjuna asserted, reality must be independent, and independence is the nature of *svabhāva*.

However, Nagarjuna claimed that the nature of reality is inexpressible. For him, ontologically we can't commit the world as neither existent/real nor as non-existent/unreal, neither both nor non-both.¹² Now, the question raised that: if the reality is inexpressible, then what is the status of the reality we experience in our day-to-day life? According to Nagarjuna, the reality we experience in our day-to-day life comes under the *samvriti-satya* (relational). For him, we cannot use language for the actual reality (*pāramārthika-satya*), because it is neither true nor false, neither both nor non-both. And, therefore, Reality in an absolute sense is inexpressible in language. Hence, we can conceive only the *vyāvahārik satya* (applied to be). So, the relation between language and reality we are talking about here is the relation between ordinary language and *samvriti satya*. *Samvriti Satya* of reality is conceived through the ordinary language that we use in our everyday lives. Now, the question is: What is the status of truth? The ontological status of truth in this *samvriti satya* depends on its pragmatic viewpoint. In this sense, we can say that Nagarjuna was a pragmatist philosopher when he talked about the relational being of reality. Nagarjuna claimed that the relational reality is constructed by human beings for their everyday life. So, the truth is the human agreement and disagreement within society. The ultimate reality is *sunya* (empty), but the *vyāvahārika* world constructed by ordinary people is not *sunya*; rather, it has practical use in ordinary life. So, for Nagarjuna,

¹⁰ Kalupahana, David J.(1999). *Mulamadhyamakakarika* of Nagarjuna (Trans.). Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas Publishers Private Limited. pp. 228

¹¹ Ibid, pp.228

¹² Op. Cit., Chetry, pp.92

ordinary people use ordinary language to construct the phenomenal part of reality, which is ultimately not a true or real one.

3. Later Wittgenstein on Language and Reality

In the previous section, we discussed Nagarjuna's view on reality and the relationship between ordinary language and the relational world. In this section, I attempt to discuss the Later Wittgenstein's concept of language and its relation to reality.

Wittgenstein was the most valuable philosopher in the twenty century. His philosophical career was divided into two periods: early and later Wittgenstein. This distinction is made not based on time, but the distinction based on accepting different approaches to conceiving the world. He is well known for his two great works: 1. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) (henceforth TLP), and 2. *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) (henceforth PI). Like other analytic philosophers, he was concerned about the relationship between language and reality. He also accepted that all philosophical problems lie in the misuse of language. So, philosophy needs a more satisfactory and clarified language system to construct knowledge of the world. In sentence 4.112 of TLP, Wittgenstein (1921; reprint in 1974) defined philosophy as:

“Philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts. Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity. A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidation. Philosophy doesn't result in ‘philosophical propositions’, but rather in the clarification of propositions. Without philosophy, thoughts are, as it were, cloudy and indistinct: its task is to make them clear and to give them sharp boundaries.”¹³

However, in his early period, Wittgenstein was more technical and concerned with the limits of his language that would be expressed either “*to be the case*” or “*not to be the case*” (Wittgenstein, 1922). In this era, he tried to use an artificial or logical language (followed by Russell's semantic language) to explain reality, and he made a boundary over it. That is why, in 5.6 of his *Tractatus*, he claimed that “*The limits of my language mean the limit of my world.*”¹⁴ The limit of his language is the listing of all factual propositions, which are described as either “to be the case” or “not to be the case”. In the last sentence of *Tractatus*, he asserted that

¹³ Wittgenstein, L. (1974). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. New York: Routledge publication. pp.30

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 68

“whatever we cannot speak we must pass over in silence.”¹⁵ In his *Tractatus*, he used a pictorial relationship between language and reality, and this pictorial relationship was determined based on the *picture theory* of meaning. He claimed that the reality conceived by the artificial or logical language must be the same for everyone. There is only one reality. The truthfulness of a proposition is determined based on whether the proposition represents a fact or not. If a proposition pictures a fact, it becomes true; if not, then it becomes false. So, in *Tractatus*, he used the Picture theory of meaning¹⁶ to determine the truth value of a proposition.

However, in this paper, my purpose is not to explain the earliest view of Wittgenstein on language but rather to show the later Wittgenstein's concept of language and reality. In his later period, Wittgenstein provided a different viewpoint, which is the opposite of his earlier one. As I mentioned above in his earlier period, he took the picture theory of meaning to determine the meaning of a proposition. To do so, he established an artificial or logical language, which is a collection of all logical propositions.

In *Investigations*, Wittgenstein realized that a logical form of philosophy is irrelevant in the *form of human life*. And, the main purpose of philosophy must be that it is public and must be used in our day-to-day life. So, he had a different outlook in his later period. In the everyday life of people, there is no relevance to a logical language. The purpose of philosophy is to share ideas among people. In our day-to-day lives, we do not use artificial language to share ideas about the world. So, in his later period, he introduced an ordinary language rather than a logical one. In his *Investigations* (proposition 133), he also asserted that:

“There is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies.”¹⁷

So, now the question is: What is the nature of language as described by Later Wittgenstein? And what is the relation between language and reality? Wittgenstein in his later era he took ordinary language as a means to determine the nature of the world. Talk about the nature of language in *PI* (11), he asserted that:

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 89

¹⁶ The picture theory of meaning is a theory that claim a onto mapping relationship between lanaguge and reality. It implies that a ture statement pictures a fact of the worlds.

¹⁷ Wittgenstein, L. (1976). *Philosophical Investigations*. London: Oxford publication. pp.51

“Think of the tools in a tool-box: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screw-driver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue, nails and screws. The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects. (And in both cases there are similarities)”.¹⁸

It signifies that a word has multidisciplinary uses in different contexts, like a tool in a toolbox. He further claimed that there are different types of language games, and a word plays a different meaning in different language games. So, the meaning of a word or sign is determined based on its use in different language games. In this regard, Wittgenstein in PI (1976, p. 432) said, “Every sign by itself seems dead. What gives it life? In use, it is alive.”¹⁹ Here, Wittgenstein provided a pragmatist interpretation of the meaning of a word. So, he looked for use, not for pictures.

However, Wittgenstein claimed that there are many language games. And every language game has its own rules. There is no common rule among them. As Wittgenstein mentioned, “Don’t say: ‘There must be something common, or they would not call ‘games’- but look and see whether there is anything common to all. For if you look at them, you will not see something common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.” (PI 66)²⁰ To make it clear, he introduced the concept of family resemblance. In a family, a member shares some similarities or dissimilarities and resemblance with other members, but doesn’t share any common quality. Like a member, a language game shares some similarities and dissimilarities with another language game, but never shares any common quality with others. Wittgenstein asserted that a language game is not just an activity; it also determines our Form of life (PI 23).²¹ Within a language game, nothing is private, everything is shareable. And that is why he denied the possibility of any type of private language.

It is clear to us that Wittgenstein, in his later period, tried to do philosophy with ordinary language, and with the help of ordinary language, he also tried to know reality. Language games played an important role in ordinary language. And, since there are different types of language games, the concept of the world may be different in different language games. So, the truthfulness of a word isn’t determined independently; rather, the truth of a word is based on

¹⁸ Ibid. pp.6

¹⁹ Ibid, pp.128

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 31

²¹ Ibdi, pp.11.

its use in a language game. So, the concept of language and its relation to the world is now clear to us.

4. Comparative Analysis Between Nagarjuna and Later Wittgenstein on Language and Reality

We already discussed Nagarjuna's theory and Later Wittgenstein's theory on language and its relation with reality. Now, in this section, an attempt has been made to show some similarities between Nagarjuna's and Later Wittgenstein's thoughts on language and reality.

The era of Wittgenstein is the early twentieth century to the middle of the twentieth century, and on the other hand, the era of Nagarjuna is approximately 2100 years ago. So, there is a huge time gap between them. Moreover, Wittgenstein was an Austrian philosopher who systematically formulated and developed his philosophical thesis. On the other hand, Nagarjuna was a religious person who focused basically on the salvation of *dukkha* (misery) to achieve *Nirvāna* (liberation). So, it is very difficult to make a comparative relationship between Wittgenstein and Nagarjuna. However, instead of doctrinal and methodological differences, some scholars still try to relate Wittgenstein to Nagarjuna in some particular fields.

In recent periods, some scholars claim that some of Nagarjuna's ideas are similar to some later Wittgenstein's ideas. They claimed that both Wittgenstein (in his later period) and Nagarjuna adopted ordinary language as a method to construct knowledge of the world. Edward Conze (1975) argued that 'there is a "spurious parallels" relationship between Wittgenstein and Buddhist thinker Nagarjuna's philosophy'.²² Chris Gudmunsen (1977), in his book *Wittgenstein and Buddhism*, boldly argued that Wittgenstein's interpretation of philosophy is based on some central concepts of Buddhist philosophy. In this regard, he said that: "Buddhist philosophy once took a markedly Wittgensteinian turn."²³ According to Frederick J. Streng (1967), "Nagarjuna's use of words for articulating ultimate truth would find a champion in contemporary philosophers of the language analysis school such as Ludwig Wittgenstein or P. F. Strawson."²⁴ For Streng, both Wittgenstein and Nagarjuna agree that metaphysical propositions do not provide any knowledge that is claimed by systematic metaphysicians. For

²² Conze, E. (1975). *Buddhist Studies 1934-1972*(US: University of Hawaii Press 1975): hereafter cited as Conze, *Buddhist Studies*, published in *Philosophy East and West* (January 1963), pp.105-115.

²³ Gudmunsen, C. (1977). *Wittgenstein and Buddhism*. published in London: Macmillan Education LTD. pp.viii

²⁴ Streng, F. J. (1967). *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning*. Tennessee: Abingdon Press pp.20

Streng, linguistic words and expressions are deeply associated with human life. It does not require any intrinsic meaning and also does not require meaning by referring outside the language system as such. Thus, both Wittgenstein and Nagarjuna deny the ontological foundation of knowledge and the principle of excluded middle functioning under the womb of logic and constructed language. They bank on ordinary language and the ordinary way of life. Thus, it seems to me that there are a good number of contemporary thinkers who have already attempted to correlate Wittgenstein with Nagarjuna.

This view of Wittgenstein is a major part of Buddhist practice over the century. The inability of language to describe or explain transcendent experience makes a relationship between Wittgenstein and Buddhist thought. Talk about the relationship between Nagarjuna and Wittgenstein, Hsueh-Li Cheng mentioned that:

“Nagarjuna’s philosophy of emptiness appears to be similar to Wittgenstein’s philosophy. Like, Wittgenstein, Nagarjuna considered language as an instrument or tool. According to both of them, to look for the meaning of a word is not to same as looking for an object or a non-lingual referent. The meaning of a word lies rather in the context or circumstances. If the context changes, the meaning of the word changes. They both claimed that metaphysical systems are simply fabrications based on a misconceived notion about the role of language in relation to the world. According to Nagarjuna as well as to Wittgenstein, philosophy cannot be a factual science about the true nature of things. The main business of philosophers is not to explain or describe the essence or existence of the universe.”²⁵

However, Nagarjuna's concept of reality and Wittgenstein's concept of reality share some similarities as mentioned above. Both of them indicated the pragmatic interpretation of conventional reality we formulate with the help of language. Moreover, not only do they share a similar form of language, but also other ideas of Wittgenstein are highly connected with some ideas of Nagarjuna. Wittgenstein emphasized on usefulness of language, rather than its representational quality. His language is ordinary or “everyday” language, used in our day-to-day life in order to make a successful communication between the speaker and the hearer. To show the similarities between Wittgenstein and Nagarjuna, Andrew P. Tuck asserts that:

²⁵ Op. Cit., Cheng. Hsueh-Li, pp. 80

“The urge for representing, defining, denoting, quantifying, and picturing began to wane, and the emphasis shifted to more contextualist methodologies. As soon as terms such as “language games”, “family resemblance”, “private language”, and “ordinary language” started to filter into the conversations of students of Indian philosophy Nagarjuna’s name was immediately and repeatedly linked with Wittgenstein.”²⁶

Language is an instrument or tool that can be used to communicate with each other, either in a verbal or non-verbal component. Wittgenstein, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, expresses that, in actuality, the meaning of a word is contained in its practical use. According to him, language plays a very important role in constructing the world. My world is determined based on my own language game, and the world that would be constructed within my language game may not be identical to the world of another language game. Like Wittgenstein, Nagarjuna divided the world into two types, such as the conventional world (*samvṛti-satya*) and the actual world (*pāramārthik-satya*). For him, the actual world (real world) is inexpressible by language. According to him, conventional reality is empty (*Sunya*). Here, the term empty means that the conventional world is neither existent nor non-existent because everything in this world is momentary. In this conventional world, we use language to construct knowledge, and we fall into the trap of language. So, the knowledge we have about the world is not the knowledge of the actual world, this is the knowledge about the conventional world. Like Wittgenstein, Nagarjuna adopted a pragmatic approach to determine the sense of words used in the conventional world. Both of them deny that words necessarily correspond to objects. For them to determine the sense of a word does not need its objective reference, but rather the sense of a word based on its usefulness in practice.

Some scholars make a close analogy between Nagarjuna’s rejection of self-conditioning entities and Wittgenstein’s rejection of private language. They claimed that both of them deny the possibility of ‘private sensation’. For Wittgenstein and Nagarjuna, private sensations are only ‘illustrated turn of speech’; hope, for instance, doesn’t refer to anything. Private object, according to both of them, is irrelevant to us.

According to Wittgenstein, a word has significance when the word is logically connected with a language game. Private language expresses the possibility that there must be elements identified independently, like Nagarjuna's *Svabhāvas*. This possibility is rejected by both

²⁶ P. Tuck, A. (1990). *Comparative Philosophy and The Philosophy of Scholarship*. New York: Oxford. pp.75

Nagarjuna and Wittgenstein. The rejection of atomic elements in the language system means that the elements must support each other mutually. This is exactly the sort of conceptual connection that Nagarjuna calls interdependent origination (*Pratityasamutpada*).²⁷

The theory of “dependent co-origination” (*Pratityasamutpāda*), as we have seen above, is highly related to Wittgenstein’s concept of “language game”. Moreover, Wittgenstein’s denial of the essentialist view regarding universal is similar to the view of Buddhist philosophy. Wittgenstein used the phrase “family resemblance” concept to describe the nature of universal, which leads to Wittgenstein as an anti-essentialist. For him, “cowness” is not a universal eternal quality shared by all cows. He asserts that we determine a universal property based on “family resemblance”, like family members, all cows share similarities and dissimilarities among them, but they do not possess any common quality or property. And based on similarities and dissimilarities, we determined the universal property as “cowness”. Likewise, the Buddhist theory of momentariness provides that there is no universal common property shared by particular class members.

Nagarjuna, in his *Mulamādhyamakakārika*, claims that “emptiness” is the only reality. His emptiness is neither nihilist nor eternalist, but pragmatist. Emptiness means that everything in the world neither exists nor non-exists because of their mutual dependence on each other. Very similar way, the Wittgensteinian concept of “emptiness” is similar to the view. According to Wittgenstein, elements neither exist nor don’t, because they are ‘part of Nagarjuna’s of language’.²⁸ They are the essence of grammar or language. Language plays a role in our everyday life. There are many language games. Every language game has its own rules to play. Thus, the sense of a word may not be identical in other language games. So, elements of language are not something, i.e., represented in facts. Nagarjuna himself states that his language is also conventional and, at the same time, empty. However, it is a difficult task to provide a complete comparison between Wittgenstein and Nagarjuna. Some of the interpreters of post-Philosophical Investigations, such as Thurman, claim that ‘Nagarjuna is a distant precursor to Wittgenstein on the subject of the conventionality of language and the social construction of philosophical ideas.’²⁹

²⁷ Waldo, I. (1978). “Nagarjuna and Analytic Philosophy II” in *Philosophy East and West*. US: University of Hawaii Press. pp. 295-296.

²⁸ Op. Cit. Gudmunsen, pp.55.

²⁹ Op. Cit., P. Tuck, pp.87.

5. Concluding Remarks

Based on the above observation, I do claim that even though Nagarjuna was born 2100 years before Wittgenstein, I find some significant meeting points between them. Some of my observations are as follows:

Firstly, I do claim that both are firm believers in ordinary language. They gave equal importance to the ways of life and the practical aspects of life.

Secondly, both of them are conventionalists and pragmatists in nature. They give importance to the conventional aspects of life. They hold that the absolute truth is inexpressible. Wittgenstein's sense is mystical in nature, and it cannot be put into words. It is nonsense, but it is illuminating nonsense. For Nagarjuna, it is pāramārthika-satya (actual reality/ absolute reality), and hence it is inexpressible and inconceivable.

Thirdly, both of them deny the possibility of private language. According to Wittgenstein, private language is not possible, and according to Nagarjuna, private language is not possible because everything is momentary and empty. His theory of dependent origination (Pratīyasamutpāda) does not allow accepting the possibility of private language.

At the end, it can be concluded that both of them deny the possibility of essentialism underlying the concept of universality. Essentialists hold that there is something common to all species of a class based on which the class concept is comprehended. But Wittgenstein denies it with the help of the metaphor 'language games' and 'family resemblance'. Likewise, Nagarjuna denies it with the concept of dependent co-origination and Sunyavāda.

However, no doubt both Wittgenstein and Nagarjuna share some similarities, but we cannot say that there is no distinction between them. Though their approaches toward reality are similar, there are some distinctions between them. As I mentioned above, their purpose is different. On one side, Wittgenstein was a systematic philosopher, generally concentrating on the problem of clarification of propositions or language to know the truth, but on the other side, Nagarjuna was a religious monk, concentrating most basically on the realization of Nirvana. As Hsush-Li Cheng said that:

“In fact, there are fundamental differences between their philosophies. According to Wittgenstein, the referential view of meaning is erroneous but the contextual

view of meaning is not...he repudiated the metaphysical use of language, Wittgenstein seemed to acknowledge the validity of the everyday use of language.”³⁰

In the same article, he asserted that:

“From Nagarjuna Standpoint, Wittgenstein seemed to have a dualistic way of thinking for he made a division between ‘the meaning of an object’ and ‘the meaning as a use’, ‘metaphysical use’, and ‘ordinary use’, ‘the description of non-linguistic facts’ and ‘the description of linguistic fact’, ‘private language’ and ‘public language’, ‘absolute certainty’ and ‘ordinary certainty’, etc.”³¹

Now, what did Nagarjuna teach us? According to Nagarjuna, the ultimate reality is “empty” (Sunya), “emptiness” is a middle way, in which the world expresses neither true nor false, neither both (true and false) nor non-both. So, expressing the meaning of an object either in the referential theory of meaning or the contextual theory of meaning becomes erroneous. Nagarjuna mentioned that no legitimate relationship is possible between language and the world. So, using language means you fall into the trap of language.

³⁰ Op. cit., Hsueh-Li Cheng, pp. 80

³¹ Ibid, pp. 81

References

1. Conze, E. (1975). *Buddhist Studies 1934-1972*(US: University of Hawaii Press 1975): hereafter cited as Conze, *Buddhist Studies*, published in *Philosophy East and West* (January 1963)
 2. Cheng, Hsueh-Li (1981). “Nagarjuna, Kant and Wittgenstein: The San-Lun Mādhyamika Exposition of Emptiness” in *Religious Studies*, vol.17. Cambridge University Press
 3. Chetry, S (2017). *Status of the External world in Buddhist Philosophy: a Study*
 4. Gudmunsen, C. (1977). *Wittgenstein and Buddhism*. published in London: Macmillan Education LTD.
 5. Kalupahana, David J.(1999). *Mulamadhyamakakarika of Nagarjuna* (Trans.). Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas Publishers Private Limited.
 6. P. Tuck, A. (1990). *Comparative Philosophy and The Philosophy of Scholarship*. New York: Oxford.
 7. Streng, F. J. (1967). *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning*. Tennessee: Abingdon Press.
 8. Waldo, I. (1978). “Nagarjuna and Analytic Philosophy II” in *Philosophy East and West*. US: University of Hawaii Press.
 9. Westerhooft, J. (2009). *Nagarjuna’s Mādhyamika*. UK: Oxford University Press
 10. Wittgenstein, L. (1974). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. New York: Routledge publication.
 11. Wittgenstein, L. (1976). *Philosophical Investigations*. London: Oxford University Press.
-