UNIT 7 WITTGENSTEIN: PICTURE THEORY OF MEANING

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Learning objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 Picture theory of meaning

7.3.1 Elementary proposition

7.3.2 Philosophy is a critique of language

7.4 Evaluation

7.5 Let us sum up

7.6 Further readings

7.7 Answers to check your progress

7.8 Model questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the picture theory of meaning
- discuss the early saying of Wittgenstein-*Philosophy is a critique of language*
- discuss critically the picture theory of meaning

7.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces to you Wittgenstein's picture theory of meaning.Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein is one of the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century. His celebrated *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* and *Philosophical Investigations* are the two models of his philosophising. He is best known as a genius. As a genius, he came to the philosophical world under the network of philosophy of language. The theory of meaning is one of the basic concepts of semantics. The picture theory of meaning is also concerned with the meaning of words and

sentences through the logical analysis of language. It also discusses the other concepts. They are such as:

- elementary proposition
- *Philosophy is a critique of language*, and
- evaluation of this theory.

7.3 PICTURE THEORY OF MEANING

The picture theory of meaning is the most important concept in Wittgenstein's early philosophy. It holds that there is a hidden structure or essence in every form of propositions or sentences. The picture theory of meaning came to his mind when he saw in a magazine a motorcar accident being represented in a law court by means of small models. They also could be used to construct different types of propositions for the exposition of the accident. This pictorial representation stimulated his mind to formulate the picture theory of meaning.

The picture theory of meaning entails that "A proposition is a model or picture of reality." It maintains that the truth or falsity of a proposition can be evaluated through the picture or model it represents of the situation.Wittgenstein writes –"A proposition can be true or false in virtue of being a picture of reality."

Language divulges the structure or form of reality. He talks about the logical structure of propositions embedded in language. He writes-"proposition communicates a situation to us, and so it must be essentially connected with the situation. And the connection is precisely that is its logical picture. Wittgenstein writes: A proposition states something only in so far as it is a picture. Wittgenstein presents his picture theory of meaning as a paragon to focus on the underlying structure of language. The underlying structure manifests the reality, which is not conspicuous in proposition.

7.3.1 Elementary proposition

Wittgenstein's picture theory of meaning is a theory of the meaning of propositions. All propositions are analysed into

ultimate proposition i.e., elementary proposition. This kind of proposition focuses on the inarticulate structure of proposition. He asserts that an elementary proposition is constituted by names. An elementary proposition is nothing but the conceptual or logical structure of propositions. He explores the essence of a proposition through the picture theory of meaning. He called it by different names like pictorial form, pictorial relationship, representational form and logical form.

Wittgenstein holds that our natural language or colloquial language cannot express the logical form of language. Thus, Wittgenstein feels that an artificial language or symbolic language or logical language is required to disclose the inward form of thought, which is regarded as the essence of proposition. He writes: “In order to understand the essential nature of a proposition, we should consider, hieroglyphic script which depicts the facts that it describes.” And he again says “A proposition shows how things stand if it is true, And it says that they do so stand.” As for the relation between the proposition and the state of affairs Wittgenstein asserts- “a proposition communicates a situation to us and so it must be essentially connected with the situation. And the connection is precisely that is its logical picture.” Russell in this context writes- “the logical picture of a fact, Wittgenstein says, is a gedanke. A picture can correspond or not correspond with the fact and be accordingly true or false, but in both cases it shares the logical form with the fact.”

Wittgenstein views that the logical form of proposition becomes prominent through analysis. He asserts that logical picture makes clear the relation between the proposition and the states of affairs. And it can bring out the true or false picture of propositions. The logical form is the common structure of all propositions. Every proposition is analysed into that form, which can depict the logical form, the essence of all propositions. Warnock writes that the account of language Wittgenstein gives

in the *TractatusLogico Philosophicus*is…… intended to be an exposition of the essence of language; an account of its concealed foundation; an excavation, so to speak, to its deepest level."

It is primarily the similarity of the concatenation that makes anything a picture. All pictures, even the pictures in the ordinary sense have the form of the objects they picture. There is a correspondence between a picture and the pictured fact. This common feature between the picture and the object is indicated as the form of representation. He writes:

"If a fact is to be a picture, a fact must have something in common with what it depicts."

Edward Paul maintaints that there are different kinds of pictures, different method of projections. But all pictures must have the same logical form in order to be able to picture reality at all, either truly or falsely. The logical form is called "the form of reality."

Wittgenstein in his picture theory of meaning shows the correspondence between the picture and the model of reality. He holds that a proposition is true when the state of affairs reflected by the picture exists. Otherwise, the proposition will be false. He in this context lays emphasis on the relation between language and reality. Reality becomes conspicuous through logical analysis of language.

The picture theory is an account of the nature of thought. Wittgenstein writes- 'A thought is a proposition with a sense'. Similarly, he points out- 'The totality of proposition is language'. Language becomes accessible through thought-process. Again, the thought-process is related with the logical picture, which is embedded in the propositions. So, he insists upon analysis of language into elementary propositions, which represent the logical picture of reality. It is the underlying structure of the proposition hidden in the thought process. So, Wittgenstein

frequently uses words like thought, proposition, language, sense etc. to radiate the picture theory of meaning.

7.3.2 Philosophy is a Critique of Language

Wittgenstein formulates the picture theory of meaning to clarify the obscurities in language through logical analysis. The business of philosophy, according to him, is not to solve the philosophical problems, but to dissolve them by showing that they are pseudo problems. So, he views that Philosophy is a critique of language. Wittgenstein writes:

"Most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but non-sensical.....Most of the propositions and questions of philosophers arise from our failure to understand the logic of our language."

Russell clarifies that philosophical problems emerge due not understanding properly the logical form of language. He divulges that philosophical problems can be resolved through grammatical investigation. He asserts that philosophical problems emerge because certain kinds of philosophical statements are clothed in misleading grammatical forms.According to him, 'we must examine the grammar of the statement. We will find, in some cases, that when we formulate the statement in terms of its 'logical form', the problem will be solved." Wittgenstein too in his earlier work lays much emphasis on grammatical similarity or surface grammar. His assertion is that philosophical problems are engendered by surface grammar. Because surface grammar insists on the similar or uniform structure of propositions, i.e., uniform grammatical form.

Wittgenstein through his critique of language has put a demarcation between ideal language or artificial language or logical language and colloquial language. He in his *Tractatus*insists on the former, because his view is that ordinary language creates puzzlement and ambiguities. Again, natural

language or ordinary language deals with the diverse functions of language or language games. Therefore, Wittgenstein, in his *Tractatus* stops the process of using natural language. Because he supports only one function of language in his earlier philosophy i.e., to extract the logical form. He, therefore, corroborate the logical analysis of language. Because it represents the logical picture of the world. He believes that propositions are analysed into elementary propositions that represent the structure of the facts or the states of affairs.

Russell also employs logical analysis of language to arrive at the final residue, i.e., atomic propositions which represent the structure of the world. Russell's belief is that when a proposition corresponds to a fact then the corresponding proposition is true. Otherwise, the proposition will be false. Russell's approach to get the picture of reality through analysis is known as logical atomism. So, there is a similarity in this context between Russell and earlier Wittgenstein. Because both put importance on logical analysis of language to focus on the logical form of propositions, which, they thought, represented the reality.

Wittgenstein's critique of language asserts that the logical analysis of language is the strategy through which philosophical problems can be resolved. The proper task of philosophy is to clarify the logical form of language. Because it removes the puzzlement and confusions rooted in philosophy. Thus, he writes- "Philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thought. Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity." He completely abandons the time-honoured conception of philosophy as the pursuit of reality and values. The traditional efforts of metaphysicians to find meaning in their statements on the basis of non-empirical methods and criteria, i.e., by combining the intuition of self-evident truths with deductive methods or by postulating the ground work of metaphysical systems as necessary pre-suppositions of experience, are rejected."

Therefore, it is clear that Wittgenstein is not only a critique of language but also a critique of traditional philosophical problems. His critique of language makes it clear that he was a staunch advocate of logical analysis of language. His main purpose in his *Tractatus* is to excavate this form of language. Logical analysis indicates the pictorial form of language. Because it can depict the hidden form of language. So, his view is that when we fail to make a relation between the picture and the fact then philosophical problems emerge. That is why; he talks about the importance of logical form of presentations. We are told "The goal of philosophical critique is the discovery of the real logical form of language. The logical form is the most important aspect of language that has to be brought into the open by analysing of language."

It can be asserted that propositions cannot represent or focus the logical form unless it is analysed by the logical analysis of language. Logical analysis of language reflects the logical form or hidden structure of propositions. So, he views that it is the panorama of all propositions. Wittgenstein's technique of logical analysis of language can remove the philosophical problems engendered by linguistic confusions. So, his technique to dissolve the philosophical problems can be regarded as the therapy. Thus, his philosophy is therapeutic.

7.4 EVALUATION

The picture theory of language violates the conventions of the language we use. The sentences of the languages we use are of linear structure. They are not maps of the facts they describe. This interpretation thus concedes that the picture theory is inconsistent with the characteristic feature of language. Maps are no doubt perspicuous representations. We find in a map or a diagram an ideal case of a one to one correspondence between a picture and the situation depicted. But

the essential difference between a map and a proposition is that while the first one is two dimensional, the latter is one-dimensional. Wittgenstein describes propositions as pictures. But a proposition may be a picture of a situation without being a two dimensional structure. So, we are in a dilemma- if the propositions are one-dimensional structure, they cannot express all the possible modes of configuration of a given number of objects; if on the other hand, they are two dimensional structures, then they cease to be linguistic propositions and become maps. If we accept the second, it makes the picture theory inconsistent with the general nature of language.

Wittgenstein in his earlier work has discredited the role of ordinary language. Instead of ordinary language, he advocates logically perfect language. But, later Wittgenstein abandons this view of language. He holds that it will be wrong to say that language follows some fixed rules. Hence, later Wittgenstein makes a disctinction between surface grammar and depth grammar. Surface grammar tries to focus on uniform appearance or structure of a sentence, which leads to logically perfect language. But later Wittgenstein changes this style of philosophising in the context of language and views that language is instrument and has diverse use. Here his view is that philosophical problems emerge when language goes on holiday. By this metaphorical sentence, he implies that when words are to be used from outside of ordinary context, philosophical problems come to light. Hence, it can be emphatically asserted that Wittgenstein's later work encompasses around the circle of ordinary language.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How did picture theory come to Wittgenstein's mind?

……

……

Q 2: What is picture theory of meaning?

…….

…….

Q 3: What is elementary proposition?

…….

…….

Q 4: What are the other names of elementary proposition?

…….

…….

Q 5: What is the common structure of all propositions?

…….

Q 6: *Philosophy is a critique of language*- write the meaning of the statement.

…….

…….

Q 7: *Language goes on holiday*- write the meaning of the statement.

…….

…….



7.5 LET US SUM UP

- Picture theory holds that there is a hidden structure or essence in every form of propositions or sentences. The picture theory of meaning came to his mind when he saw in a magazine a motorcar accident being represented in a law court by means of small models. They also could be used to construct different types of propositions for the exposition of the accident.
- Wittgenstein's picture theory of meaning is a theory of the meaning of propositions. All propositions are analysed into ultimate proposition i.e., elementary proposition. This kind of proposition focuses on the inarticulate structure of proposition. He asserts that an elementary proposition is constituted by names.

An elementary proposition is nothing but the conceptual or logical structure of propositions.

- Russell clarifies that philosophical problems emerge due not understanding properly the logical form of language. He divulges that philosophical problems can be resolved through grammatical investigation. He asserts that philosophical problems emerge because certain kinds of philosophical statements are clothed in misleading grammatical forms.
- Wittgenstein is not only a critique of language but also a critique of traditional philosophical problems. His critique of language makes it clear that he was a staunch advocate of logical analysis of language. His main purpose in his *Tractatus* is to excavate this form of language.
- Wittgenstein holds that our natural language or colloquial language cannot express the logical form of language. Thus, Wittgenstein feels that an artificial language or symbolic language or logical language is required to disclose the inward form of thought, which is regarded as the essence of proposition.



7.6 FURTHER READINGS

1) Dwivedi, D.N. (1977). A study of Wittgenstein's Philosophy. Darshan peeth,177 Tagore Town, and Allahabad
2) Ammerman, Robert R (ed.) (1965) Classics of Analytic Philosophy (Tata McGraw- Hill Publishing Company, Bombay- New Delhi
3) Bakhle, S.W. (1987). Nature and Development of Linguistic Philosophy. Dattsons- Nagpur 1)
4) Bhattacharyya, Bhaskar (2014). *Analytic Philosophy of Wittgenstein*. EBH Publishers India (Ltd)