
UNIT 2 RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this chapter is to have an understanding of the need and importance of philosophical reflection with respect to the religious language. This chapter carries out the historical and philosophical significance of the introspection thinkers carried out with respect to religious language. As one or the other religion is prevalent in entire humanity as such at all times, we will be carrying out an overall study of the different thinkers' viewpoints with respect to religious language in both the Indian and Western tradition. Thus, this chapter attempts to make the readers equip with the need and necessity of the philosophical reflection of religious language. At the end of this chapter, you may be in a position

- to have a basic understanding of the need of philosophical reflection of religious language
- to have acquainted with different philosophers' understanding on the issue of religious language
- to have a conceptual clarity of the different functions of religious language
- to have an overall grasp of the issue of religious language

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Why one is to study the nature of religious language? What is special about religious language? Or is religious language and ordinary language the same? Essentially, the discussion in religious language pertains to one basic issue as to what we can say about God. In the broadest sense, the religious language discussions are based on what is the nature and function of the language that is employed in religious literature. The discussion is carried out not only in western tradition, but also in Indian and in other traditions as well. I will try to focus on Indian and western traditions with respect to their concerns on the nature of religious language. In order to make this issue more concrete, let us

try to take few examples and start the analysis. Find below some of the passages from Vedas and Bible

In the prayer to the cosmic Being, '*purusa*', the prayer starts with the following description - "A thousand heads has the Universal man, Purusha; as also a thousand eyes and a thousand feet He has. He spreads over the earth on all sides and beyond it as far as ten fingers can count." (Purusa Sookta- Rigveda -10.90)

"The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; the face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all; he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken." (Psalm 34:15-20)

"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'" (John 11:25-26)

What is the nature of these types of utterances? How do we make sense of these descriptions about the divinity? Or how are we to understand those religious utterances that talk about God. For example, how does God have thousand heads and thousand eyes and thousand feet? Similarly, what type of description it is, when we talk of God's eyes and ears? What does it mean to say that those who believe in God will live forever? Does it make sense? If so, how we should make sense of it?

In the context of religious language discussion, for those types of descriptions of God, which apparently do not have any such problem in understanding the meaning as well, there too we find it difficult to see how certain descriptions can be ascribed to God. Suppose, when we say that God is kind, good, merciful, loving, etc, do we mean it the same way as we use the terms for our ordinary human experiences like saying that person X is kind and loving or person Y is good. That means the attributes like kind, love, caring, good, etc carry the same meaning when we apply in the context of humans and divinity? If they carry the same meaning, then how do we differentiate Godly attributes with humans? If they are different, then how do we understand the meanings of kind and good with respect to God? The reason for such type of a problem is that God is considered to be one supreme reality without differences. If God is infinite and transcendent, then how that infinite, timeless and transcendent supreme power be predicated with qualities like kind, good, etc, which we ascribe to normal human beings?

More so, if they are attributes, are they essential or accidental attributes of God? If we apply the attribute of 'kind' to God, then does it mean the same like we say that 'X is kind'? Moreover, there is a possibility that 'X may not be kind as well, but can we think of God not being kind? This implies that the attributes we give to human beings may be an accidental one (without that attribute also, they can be), whereas the attributes we give to God cannot be accidental (without that attribute, it cannot be). It becomes an essential and inherent attribute of the God. These are some of the issues about which thinkers were concerned when they reflect upon the nature of religious language. In this context, when we use the language to describe God, when we predicate God, how are we to understand those utterances?

2.2 UNIVOCAL AND EQUIVOCAL WAY

Thinkers, particularly religious philosophers differed on the way to understand the language used in religion in order to address the above mentioned issues. Traditionally, the answers to the process of understanding the religious language were done in three different modes.

Univocal Language

This position states that one should have the same meaning in whichever context that word is employed. The words that are employed in the language carry the same meaning throughout irrespective of the context or situation in which it is used. For example, suppose I say, white board, white chalk, white sari, etc. in all these cases, the 'white' refers to the same thing, the color white. In the medieval thought, John Duns Scotus (1266-1308) proposed this particular view with respect to the religious language. In the context of religious language, this position argues that terms when they are used either with reference to God or with reference to human beings, must mean the same. If it doesn't be the same univocal meaning, it will be difficult to understand what it means in the context of God. This approach would argue that God is good in the same sense in which it is used in the human context. Suppose, the word 'kind' is used in a different sense as compared to it being used in a human context, then how could we ever understand what does it mean to say 'kind' in the context of God? But the basic problem of how the same predicate be attributed with the same meaning to God as well as human beings is a major problem for the univocalists to address.

Equivocal Language

This position states that the words that are employed in the language carry different meanings depending upon the context and the situation in which it is being used. There can be two senses in which a word may mean differently in different context. One is called as *homonym*, where the same word actually refers to two or more things, which causes confusion in understanding its meaning. For example, the word 'Bat' is used to refer to cricket bat as well as to a flying mammal. Similarly, the word 'light' refers to objects not so heavy and at the same time; also refers to one physical property 'light'. While the equivocal nature with respect to such types of words can be sorted out by finding which meaning that word corresponds to, by understanding the context, the equivocal nature with respect to religious language takes the position that terms do mean differently with respect to God as against human contexts. As mentioned earlier, when we use the word 'kind' it cannot have the same meaning with respect to God and the human being. So, the meaning has to be different. If the meanings are different, then how can one make sense of the meaning when he makes a positive assertion about God that 'God is kind'? According to equivocalists, definitely it can't be the same sense as univocalists claim that there has to be only one sense of the word with respect to 'kind' in both the human and the divine context. The problem for equivocalists is that they cannot admit of single unique sense of the words employed in religious language, like the univocalists do, and at the same time, they have to tackle the problem of understanding the meaning of the word, if they have two different senses altogether with respect to divine and human context. And because there is a problem in making sense with respect to different senses of the word, one can think of the corollary of equivocal position that will lead to describe God in the negative way.

This position speaks of a negative way in understanding God. That is, we can be more certain of what God is not, rather than be certain of what God is. This element of thought was not quite prevalent in the West as in the case of Indian philosophy. In the Indian context, the Absolute is conceptualized as that which is beyond any definition. Sankaracharya (788 – 820) mentions in the commentaries of Brhadaranyaka Upanisad that words denote things through one or the other of the following: name, form action, distinction, genus and quality; but in Brahman (Absolute Reality) there is none of these differences and hence it cannot be described. Whatever descriptions we have of the Supreme Being, it cannot be the true description. It is more prudent to describe in a negative way than the positive way. The path of describing Brahman in the negative as '*neti, neti*' (not this, not this) is a well established method of describing the Supreme Being in Indian tradition. Rabbi Moses Ben Maimon (Maimonides) (1135-1204) is one of the most famous proponents of this doctrine in the Western Medieval thought.

2.3 ANALOGICAL WAY

Analogical Language:

This position tries to maintain a mid-way between the univocal and the negative approach of describing the Reality. In the medieval period, St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was using this principle to explain our understandings with respect to predicates of God. Basically, analogy is used in language to show the similarity or the likeness between two entities or descriptions. Thomas Aquinas uses this principle to show the likeness between God and the humans. Aquinas subscribed to the view that God is not a being like any other being. Hence, the univocal function of language employed in religion, according to him, may not work. But, Aquinas at the same time does not want to take a purely negative way of understanding Godly attributes. He in a sense strikes a balance between the univocal and equivocal way of understanding the religious statements, which translates in to an analogical way.

In the Indian context too, an attempt was made to understand the religious language through a metaphorical or secondary meaning. While, the univocal meaning, which in Indian context is called as *vacyartha* (literal meaning), is not sufficient enough for the descriptions in relation to Divinity and the equivocal way resulting in the negative descriptions of Reality, some attempts were made to give a positive description without getting into the problem of univocal and equivocal way. The Indian grammarians came up with the concept of secondary meaning, which was adopted by some other Indian philosophical schools as well. These secondary meanings are called metaphorical meanings or *lakshyartha*. When the words in the sentences refer to their literal meaning, but such literal meaning does not appear to make sense and hence when one looks for the secondary meaning, then it is called as *lakshyartha*. Classic example is 'a hamlet in the river Ganges'. In this example, as there is no possibility of a hamlet being in the Ganges, we have to look for secondary meaning, which may suggest that the hamlet is very close to the bank of the river Ganges. Even in our daily utterances also, we use such types of expression. When we say, "Sachin Tendulkar is God of Cricket", what we mean is not a literal meaning of the words in the sentences, we may mean Sachin Tendulkar as being as close to perfect in playing Cricket.

This theory was quite important amongst all philosophical schools that try to describe the nature of ultimate reality which is in a sense beyond expression.

“Metaphorical meanings which are based on the literal meanings are helpful in extending the range of expression without making the idea too vague for objective communication”. Thus, there is a systematic and serious attempt to understand the religious language through the secondary meaning, thereby making the statements about God as meaningful.

Talking about Aquinas, he explains analogy in two different ways. One is the analogy of ‘attribution’ and the other is the analogy of ‘proportionality’. Aquinas uses the analogy of ‘attribution’ to explain the attributes of God. Suppose we use the example, ‘he is healthy’ and another sentence ‘medicine is healthy’. The way we use to say a person being healthy is not the same way we use to say medicine being healthy. While we use the word ‘healthy’ with respect to person in a literal sense, we use the word ‘healthy’ with respect to the medicine in a causal sense. In the similar fashion, when we say that ‘X is kind’ and ‘God is kind’, we use them analogically. The analogical relation here means that as God is the cause of everything in the world, every predicate can be virtually attributed to Him. So, when we talk of attributes like kind, love, etc in human context, the same can be meaningfully applied in the context of Divine as well as He being the cause of all those predicates like love, kind, care, etc.

In the analogy of ‘proportionality’, it talks of a relative relationship between the God and its creatures. Suppose we say that a man and woman are faithful to each other and we also say that a dog is faithful. We for sure know that the way we mean that man and woman are faithful to each other is definitely not the same way in which we say that dog is faithful. But, at the same time, there is a similarity existing between those elements of faithfulness between the man and the woman and between the dog and the master that makes us to understand, analogically the idea of faithfulness that is exhibited in the dog as well. Just as the dog participates in the idea of faithfulness partially to its extent possible in proportion to human, similarly the humans participate proportionally in the divine attributes in proportion to God. John Hick (1922-) gives this example to illustrate the idea of proportionality.

2.4 LOGICAL POSITIVISTS AND WITTGENSTEIN

While the prominent discourse on religious language in the medieval period was with respect to the issue of how to understand the meaningfulness of religious utterances, there was not much debate to consider whether the religious utterances are ‘really’ meaningful. So, most of the time in the medieval period, there was not much issue with the question of cognitive content of religious language, the discussion was only to find out how to cognize the content of the religious language. The former issue, if religious language was meaningful at all, was taken more seriously in the 19th century, particularly taking the cue from David Hume’s (1711 – 1776) work. David Hume belonging to the empiricist tradition of philosophy, says regarding religion and divinity in his work *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* thus, “If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.”

This outright rejection of religious and metaphysical works by Hume as sophistry and illusion and which doesn’t have any significant cognitive value, was carried

further by the Logical Positivists. The Logical Positivists, also called as Vienna Circle, were a group of thinkers, philosophers who were primarily concerned with the truthfulness of any statement. They embarked on a project of coming out with a criteria of verification. They were bothered about finding the principle by which one can say that a statement X is meaningful or not. Their focus is on finding the principle which makes a statement to be meaningful and thereby sensical. And those statements which are not meaningful are deemed non-sensical and they are set aside as they will not have any cognitive value, that is, knowing those non-sensical statements will not have any improvement in our gaining of knowledge. The group was started by one philosopher by name Moritz Shlick (1882-1936) and some of the important thinkers of that group were Rudolph Carnap, Friedrich Wiseman, Otto Neurath, and others.

The significance of the logical positivists with respect to our discussion is that in their pursuit of showing the meaningful statements, they relegated any talk about God and Godly attributes as utterly meaningless. For them, the religious language is nonsensical in nature. While the equivocalists were rejecting the language of descriptions with respect to God in order to maintain *His* purity, the same cannot be said for Logical Positivists. They rejected the entire episode of religious utterances as nonsensical and meaningless, maybe without any serious commitment to the God's supreme and transcendent nature. The group influenced thinkers like A J Ayer who came out with a verifying principle to employ it in religious language to show that they are meaningless statements.

While we talk about Logical Positivists, we need to talk about a philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) who influenced the Logical Positivist School to a great extent, but, who by himself was not committed to their ideology. Wittgenstein's work *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* (shortly *Tractatus*) mentioned clearly about the function and the limits of the language. According to him, the function of the language is to picture the reality and the sense of the language lies in its ability to mirror the world of experience. Any language which does not picture the reality is treated as non-sense and in this way; the religious language and even the metaphysical language were deemed non-sensical. Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus* says, "The *limits of my language* mean the limits of my world". In the same line, he says, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent". With this clear demonstration of the limits of language, Wittgenstein categorized the language of religion, morals, etc to the realm of non-sensical and meaningless. This phase of Wittgenstein can be marked as the *early* Wittgenstein.

While, the logical positivists thought that non-sensical statements do not have any significant purpose in our life and hence statements about God do not have any specific meaning and hence useless, but, Wittgenstein himself was maintaining that that which is meaningless and non-sensical is what matters most. This difference in position with respect to the significance of non-sense leads to the friction between Wittgenstein and Logical Positivists. We will come back to this enigmatic philosopher later when we are to discuss a position totally against the Logical Positivists' position. However, taking the cue from *early* Wittgenstein, Logical Positivists proceeded further. According to Logical Positivism, there are two types of sentences which have meaning. One is the Analytic propositions and the other is the synthetic propositions. Analytic propositions are those meaningful propositions which derive their meaning by the virtue of their definitions. Broadly, mathematical and logical statements do come under this category, e.g. $3+3 = 6$. Synthetic propositions are those meaningful propositions

which derive their meaning on the basis of our sense experience. They are meaningful because we can able to confirm the sentence's meaning on the basis of the possibility of our sense experiences. Example, this grass is green; There is a railway track by the side of my house, etc. Since religious statements do not fit in any of these two categories, they are relegated as meaningless.

2.5 VERIFICATION PRINCIPLE AND FALSIFICATION PRINCIPLE

Two principles made a strong case against the meaningful nature of religious language. One is the 'verification principle' of A J Ayer and the other is the 'falsification principle' of Anthony Flew.

A J Ayer (1910-1989), was a British philosopher who came out with the 'principle of verification'. For him, 'A statement which cannot be conclusively verified cannot be verified at all. It is simply devoid of any meaning.' If we adopt the two categories (analytic and synthetic propositions) alone to be meaningful, which was according to Ayer as well, the two possibilities of any sentence to be meaningful, then what can be the nature of the descriptions of God? Can statements about God be analytical or can it be synthetic? Ayer opines that since metaphysical and religious statements do not correspond to either analytical or synthetic, they are meaningless. They are non-sensical. And any utterances related to them do not carry any meaning and hence they are to be discarded. As A.J. Ayer says, "The term 'god' is a metaphysical term. And if 'god' is a metaphysical term, then it cannot even be probable that God exists. For to say that 'God exists' is to make a metaphysical utterance which cannot be either true or false. And by the same criterion, no sentence which purports to describe the nature of a transcendent god can possess any literal significance." Thus, Ayer does not only reject God's existence and any utterances related to God, but, rather he rejected any possibility of making religious utterances meaningful as those utterances do not come under the principles of verification. This has put the religious language as those set of meaningless sentences which are in the guise of language but do not have any feature necessary to be language.

Anthony Flew (1923-2010), another British philosopher, comes out with the idea of falsification. In his article, 'Theology and Falsification', Flew comes up with the idea that religious language are meaningless as they cannot be falsified. Falsifiability is the other side of the coin of the verifiability. Flew opined that religious statements can be cognitively meaningful, if we can able to think of some evidence that can falsify it. That is, if a statement has to be meaningful, then there should be a way to falsify that statement. If there is no way to falsify that statement, then that statement cannot be meaningful. Can religious statement be falsified? If falsified, then they are meaningful, if not, then according to Flew, they are meaningless.

Suppose we have a religious statement that "God loves all humans" and if we see so much of suffering happening in this world, (we do see!), then immediately we question that if God loves all humans, then why there should be so much suffering. If the answer is that the God loves all human beings is false, then Flew would accept that it is a meaningful language and therefore the religious language is meaningful. But, most of the times, the religious believers will not accept that God loves all humans as false, though there is lots of suffering. On the other hand, they may try to say that the way God loves us is different from

the way we understand love. This in a sense either suggests that the words are equivocal, used in different meanings or more so, suggests that there is no way to falsify this statement, hence according to Flew meaningless.

The non-cognitive nature of religious language is because of the reason that it cannot substantiate its position with respect to verification and falsification criteria. Is there any other way, by which we can prove that religious statements are cognitive? Or is proving that religious language as cognitive is the only way to make them as meaningful?

2.6 RESPONSES TO VERIFICATION AND FALSIFICATION PRINCIPLE

Religious thinkers and philosophers tried to defend their position against verification and falsification principles. It is not that verification principle is an error proof principle. Though, I do not want to go to the intricacies of the argument, but it is suffice to say that Ayer's verification principle faced serious objections. One rudimentary refutation is that the statement of the principle of verification itself cannot be verified according to the principle of verification. Moreover, Ayer's position with respect to genuine factual proposition, that is, the principle of verification for a statement, which was articulated in both his first and more sophisticated version in the second edition of his book *Language, Truth and Logic* has been questioned and rejected.

With the rejection of the verification principle, how can one understand the religious language? The rejection of verification principle also suggests that one need not take religious utterances as purely meaningless. The meaninglessness of religious language is only on the basis of verification principle and if the verification principle itself is refuted, then it indirectly suggests at least the possibility of religious utterances being meaningful. So, how can the religious utterances be meaningful? There are different strands of thought in relation to the aspect of finding the meaningfulness of religious language as against the verification and falsification criteria.

Paul Tillich (1886-1965), understands the meaning of religious language with a difference he made between signs and symbols. Let us take the case of a bottle written on top that it contains 'sugar'. This is a sign for Tillich because it merely signifies what is contained in the bottle. The meaning of the sign is derived from what is contained in the bottle, whereas, a symbol, like 'Aum' or 'Cross' do not only signify the divinity, but also participates in it. Put it in this way, the symbol 'Aum' or 'Cross' is as much sacred as the divinity itself, like our national flag has as much prestige as the nation itself. Our national flag symbolizes the nation. It participates in the prestige of the nation. Paul Tillich through these and similar examples was trying to show that religious language does not operate like a sign, which merely signifies like other ordinary language. Religious language participates in symbolizing the divinity. This suggests that the meaningfulness of the religious language has to be looked not only from the perspective of its significations; rather it should also be looked from its symbolizing nature. This means, the religious language's meaningfulness should not be based upon its verifiability criteria alone, but, its meaningfulness depends upon the symbolizing nature of the language itself, that is, what it means to the believers' why they use the religious language.

Remember Ludwig Wittgenstein, who made a significant contribution to Logical Positivists thought. The same philosopher, in his *later* phase had come up with

another work *Philosophical Investigations*, which takes a different turn with respect to the nature of language and functions. While, Wittgenstein in his earlier stage maintained that language has sole function to perform that of picturing the reality and those language utterances which cannot perform such function is relegated as meaningless and non-sensical. Whereas, in the later stage, Wittgenstein denounced that role for language and came up with the notion that language have multiple functions to perform. To understand the meaning of an utterance in the language is to see, how it is being employed in the given context. He calls this aspect of language as language-game. The concept of language-game has played a significant role in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. He arrived at this conception with the help of certain similarities between the various uses of language and the rules of various games. Just as there are varieties of games there are also varieties in linguistic usage. Any game for that matter is guided by a set of rules. Similarly, according to Wittgenstein, every linguistic-usage is guided by certain rules. For example, trebling a ball with hands is an allowed move in basketball, but the same is treated as a foul in football. A foul is nothing but trespassing of a rule which is established by way of a convention. What is more important in this game analogy is that a participant's view of the game is different from that of an observer. This twist in the position of the language broadens the discussion related to the understanding of religious language. The basic question now changes to why the meaningfulness of religious language should always be oriented towards whether it is verifiable or falsifiable? Rather the meaningfulness of the religious utterances and beliefs lies in the way it is being *used*. The crux of the argument is that language does not work on the basis of its meaning, whether it makes sense or not, rather it works on the basis of how it is used in our life.

What is the significance of language-game for our understanding of religious language? Wittgenstein maintains that the language employed in religious utterances need not be seen whether it corroborates with the facts or not. Let us take the examples with which we started. How does God have thousand heads and thousand eyes and thousand feet? Similarly, what type of description it is, when we talk of God's eyes and ears? What does it mean to say that those who believe in God will live forever? Does it make sense? If so, how we should make sense of it? For these types of religious statements, the sense do not depend upon if they are corroborating with the facts – that is, testing if a religious believer will ever die or not; or testing if God really has ears and eyes or not? These religious statements make sense by the way it regulates the person's (believer) life.

R.D. Braithwaite (1900-1990) believed that religious statements are moral in content and can therefore be verified as they can result in change of behaviour. While Wittgenstein gave the room for understanding religious utterances from a different standpoint away from the Logical Positivist traditions, by making the meaningfulness of the language on the basis of its use, Braithwaite extended this argument further by maintaining that the use of religious language lies in its moral content. In the similar vein to Wittgenstein, Braithwaite argued that religious assertions are based upon a commitment to live life in a particular way. Like Wittgenstein, he said that religious believers need not have to think whether the historical accounts of religious utterances are verifiable or not. For example, a Hindu need not really have to verify when Krishna was born and where He was born, similarly for Christianity as well. What really matters for him is that how Krishna wants us to live and what qualities and attitudes we have to inculcate in order to lead a religious form of life.

Similarly, for Flew's falsification principle as well, there are a good number of responses from the theological and philosophical community. One of the answers to the problem of Flew's falsification problem was given by R M Hare (1919 – 2002) an English moral philosopher. Hare suggested that instead of looking at religious statements to be capable of falsified or not, we have to see them as the point of reference from where the explanations, verifiability, falsifiability makes sense. That means, he is suggesting that religious language are in a sense beyond scientific cognition. Hare calls the religious statements are the outcome of our experience, which he calls as *blik*. A *blik* according to him is an 'unverifiable and unfalsifiable interpretation of one's experience. Hare says, "... it is by our bilks that we decide what is and what is not an explanation." According to Hare, religious people have a religious *blik*. The religious people make their utterances from this religious blip standpoint. Hare explains his position through the parable of *Paranoid*. So, to get in the idea of falsifiability and verifiability of religious utterances do not make sense, because those criteria are offered from a different *blik* altogether, maybe a scientific *blik*. In a sense, Hare is agreeing to Flew's falsifiability position, but he may not agree to Flew's position of setting aside religious statements as meaningless and nonsense. What he agrees with is that it may be meaningless and nonsense from the scientific *bliks*, but, it may not be from the religious *blik*.

B G Mitchell (1917) was trying to respond to Flew's position from a slightly different angle. He comes up with the parable of *Stranger* and tries to show that religious utterances do have cognitive meaning, but the truthfulness or falsity will be known only at the end. John Hick (1922) also tries to make a similar position when he says that all the matters of faith will be verified at the end of time. His theory thus suggests that religious statements are verifiable, but not in the present situation, but at the end of time, those beliefs can be verified. His theory is called as Eschatological Verification. John Hick in his work *Faith and Knowledge* uses the allegory of the Quest for Celestial City. In this, he narrates that a theist and atheist are walking on the same road. While the theists believe that there is a destination, a Celestial City, the atheists believes that there is no final destination and it is an endless road. The point is, if there really is a destination, then the theists belief is proved right, but, if there is no destination on the endless road, the atheists position cannot be justified as the road is endless, it can never be verified.

Thus, one can see a growth of literature in the philosophical reflection of religious language as possible answers and solutions keep sprouting from very many sources regarding the meaningfulness nature of religious language. In the attempt to defend and support the meaningfulness of religious language against the strict scientific criteria of verifiability and falsifiability, thinkers come out with novel and fresh way of looking at the whole issue. The way Wittgenstein showed with respect to the use of religious language takes us beyond the narrow confinements of issues related merely to the cognitivity of religious utterances. It in fact, leads to further discussions above and beyond the cognitivity of religious assertions that include understanding the multiple uses of religious utterances. The discourse pertaining to religious language thus gets enriched by these different contributors and one can take the finer aspect of philosophical speculations and sophisticated arguments in their works that shall generate a great amount of interest for any student of philosophy.

2.7 LET US SUM UP

In this chapter, we tried to understand the nature of religious language. Religious language posed a problem for the thinkers as understanding the meaning of the religious language was taken to be a serious issue of discussion. While in the medieval period, the issue of understanding the religious language was confined to the discussions of univocal, equivocal and analogical ways, in the modern period, the discussion was with respect to the meaningfulness and cognitive nature of religious language. The project of Logical Positivists and the challenges of verification and falsification principle made the meaningfulness of religious language in jeopardy. However, thinkers like Wittgenstein, Tillich, Hare, Hick, and all tried to resist this challenge by offering different possible solutions to the problem by having a diverse perspective with respect to meaningfulness of religious language. The discourse pertaining to religious language expanded its domain, and still continues to generate a very high and interesting amount of literature in this domain of study.

2.8 KEY WORDS

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| Vachyārtha or abhidhaa | : Primary meaning or literal meaning. For example – the word ‘pot’ referring to the actual entity pot. |
| Lakshyārtha | : Secondary meaning or metaphorical meaning. |
| Non-sensical | : Those sentences which cannot be verified |
| Blik | : Unverifiable and Unfalsifiable interpretation of one’s life |

2.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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