INTRODUCTION

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Meaning is intrinsic to the life of human beings. It is meaning that gives life a goal, explanation and fulfillment. This is the reason that the quest for meaning is a major concern of philosophy and religion. In fact, this quest is the source of philosophy and religion. Philosophy is the search for the meaning of life, while religion is one of the most influential institutions that direct individuals to the meaning of life. The criterion of meaning differs from time to time. Aristotle considered reason as the basic criterion, since it is indigenous to humans. That is why he defined humans as rational animals. Others, like the British empiricists, stressed experience as the criterion for everything. Naturally, reason and experience were considered as the two fundamental sources of human knowledge. At the same time, both these resources were in constant conflict and in certain periods in the history of the rational itinerary of humanity, one dominated the other. Rationalists gave importance to reason and empiricists gave importance to experience. Both tried to prove the existence of God or some supernatural power either by reason or by experience.

Philosophers of religion were trying to give a rational footing to religious belief throughout the centuries. As a result of the emergence of logical positivism in the 20th century which rejected all metaphysical statements as meaningless on the basis of the verifiability principle of meaning, religious language was made meaningless. The logical positivists reduced the sacred values of religions which have been guiding human consciousness for centuries to the subjective realm of emotions.
In reaction to this, the philosophers of religion were in search of the meaningfulness and justification of religious language, therefore giving a rational footing to religious belief. Wittgenstein, the most influential linguistic philosopher of 20\textsuperscript{th} century, has made a far-reaching impact on epistemology, logic, mathematics, philosophy of language and the philosophy of religion. With him, language became one of the most important elements in the philosophy of religion along with reason and experience. He integrated reason and experience within the linguistic framework.

Philosophy is conceived as a critique of language in both phases of Wittgenstein’s philosophy. While philosophizing, he understood that problems cannot be solved; they dissolve. Philosophical problems, which arise when language goes on holiday, are compared to a mental cramp. A person caught up in philosophical perplexity is compared to one who is caught up in a room and wants to go out but doesn’t know the way, or a fly caught in a fly-bottle. The function of philosophy is to show a way out. For him, "philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language."\textsuperscript{1} So the function as well as the method of philosophy is the same in both phases of his philosophy. Philosophy has a therapeutic function, and its method is linguistic analysis. However, the method of analysis Wittgenstein employs is different in the two stages of his philosophy.

Linguistic analysis focuses mainly on meaning rather than existence. In order to explore meaning, he proposes two theories of meaning. His profound thought on religious belief is based on these theories of meaning. In his early linguistic analysis religious values acquired the status of the ‘mystical,’ that is, the realm of silence. This is characterised as “wordless faith.” Based on the new understanding of meaning as use in his later philosophy, Wittgenstein legitimises religious language. This pragmatic understanding of language allows religious language to have its footing in human life. Therefore, religious belief anchored in human life is characterised as “groundless believing.”

This new understanding of meaning makes language dynamic and pluralistic, which is in sharp contrast to Wittgenstein's earlier philosophy. The exploration of dynamism in religion is interesting, and it challenges institutionalised religions. An exposition of the pluralistic understanding of religious belief is very relevant today especially in India, where we have a pluralistic religious and cultural heritage.

The present study is a search for the possibility of religion in Wittgenstein and the possibility of a meaningful talk about religion in his philosophy. These possibilities are found after a grammatical investigation into the depth grammar of language which is used in the particular context of religion. This is an attempt to bring out Wittgenstein’s sublime thoughts on religious beliefs found in various scattered remarks on the topic and to show its relevance for today. This we do in four chapters by analysing Wittgenstein’s linguistic philosophy, though I adopt more of an interpretative and descriptive method in this endeavour.
There is a persisting tendency in Wittgenstein to doubt the possibility of meaningful religious expression in language. Any attempt to express religion in words becomes unavoidably nonsense at the early stage of his philosophy due to the view of language he presented in *Tractatus*. An attempt at religious expression in language is to overstep the boundary of language resulting in nonsense. However, Wittgenstein's later philosophy with a renewed understanding of language with its multiple functions and meaning with its context sensitivity makes possible a meaningful talk about religious beliefs demarcating it from factual beliefs.

Since the life situations of a person influence his thoughts, in the first chapter I outline Wittgenstein's life. The first part deals with a brief biographic sketch. The second part examines his philosophical background by mentioning some of the philosophers who influenced him. The last part elucidates his attitude toward religion and his religious background, to prepare the ground for the discussion on religious beliefs.

The second chapter expounds Wittgenstein’s early philosophy in two sections. The first section analyzes the relationship between language, thought and reality through the picture theory of meaning. According to this theory, which is the core of the first phase of his philosophy, language is the picture of reality – the world. The logical form is seen as the common ground of correspondence. What we can speak, we can speak with clarity about what is within the world – “facts.” The second section of this chapter shows the other side of the boundary. This is the realm of what is beyond language. All metaphysical, religious and ethical assertions are attempts to go beyond the boundary of language. The world with its facts which can
be described in language belongs to the realm of saying and that which is beyond the facts, ethics, religion, metaphysical self, logical form that is shared by language and reality. Therefore, this chapter is an attempt to explicate what can be said, and thereby to show that religion and religious beliefs belong to the realm of silence.

In the later philosophy of Wittgenstein, there is a move from static view of language to a dynamic one as an activity and as grounded upon something other than an independent reality. A shift from linguistic form to linguistic function can be observed in this transitional period. Therefore, I outline Wittgenstein’s renewed understanding of language and religious belief in third chapter. The first section discusses his linguistic philosophy based on the new theory of meaning, according to which the meaning of a word is its use in language. The essence of language is in its function. This has brought about a revolution in analytical philosophy where meaning is understood as reference. Language is seen as an activity which has a function to perform. This linguistic analysis is based on his notion of the ‘language game.’ The multiplicity of language games and the autonomy of language games are developed on the basis of the ‘family resemblance’ and ‘form of life.’ Language gains meaning by its use in a particular context. Meaning becomes context-conditioned and occasion sensitive. The second section of this chapter explores how far one can apply Wittgenstein’s new understanding of philosophy and language to religion and religious beliefs. The multiple use of language and occasion-sensitive understanding of language make possible meaningful talk about religion and religious beliefs. The use of language within the context of religion makes religious assertions and language associated with religious ceremonies meaningful. The third
section of this chapter focuses on Wittgenstein’s thoughts on religious beliefs based on his lectures, remarks and conversations. At this point, I try to explicate the depth grammar of religious beliefs to see the connections among the different elements of the language game that are used. The possibility of a meaningful talk about religious belief is sought by analyzing the symbolic and expressive nature of religious belief through the celebration of various rituals.

This new understanding of language opens a new horizon in the philosophy of religion. Therefore, in the fourth chapter I explore Wittgenstein's philosophy in today’s context and critically evaluate his philosophy of religious belief. The main focus, in the first part, is on his understanding of the ‘mystical.’ The next section examines whether Wittgenstein’s philosophy with his theory of “family resemblance” can support and explain the phenomenon of religious pluralism. The following sections critically evaluate the dynamic, social, pragmatic and ethical nature of religion and religious belief. Wittgenstein's own way of looking at things from a religious point of view is analyzed by looking into the possibility of varieties of understanding of religious beliefs.

Thus, this dissertation looks into the pragmatic, dynamic, creative and pluralistic dimensions of religion and religious beliefs by exploring the linguistic analysis of Ludwig Wittgenstein. It appreciates the valuable contribution of his profound thought to the philosophy of religion, and it brings forth the challenges that Wittgenstein's philosophy poses to the dogmatic, exclusivists and fundamentalist attitude toward religion.