

# LINGUISTIC SPECULATION IN THE EAST AND THE WEST

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Linguistic speculation in the east and the west fundamentally seems to be identical in the context of form and structure of the language but through intensive study it has been revealed that western studies examine only the external aspect while Indian thoughts disclose the internal aspects of language. Western investigation is limited to mundane and objective knowledge but Indian thoughts of language proceed deeper and deal with subjective and insight theory of language. Apparently western speculation of language is mundane but Indian thoughts of language are spiritual in nature.

Language reveals itself like a living and well adorned wife to her husband<sup>1</sup>. Language is an important tool, which not only distinguishes man from the animals but also mediates human knowledge. Any knowledge about anything comes to us only and only through language. In the west, it was Aristotle who established the classical view of man as a being who has language. Now-a-days, the western scholars have begun to study the conception of language. It is essential to study language from within. A new name or term has been coined by the western scholars - 'meta-language' - which studies the nature of language. <sup>2</sup> J.G. Herder and W.V. Humboldt are regarded as the founders of modern linguistic science. The theory propounded by them is known as idealistic conception of language. Eminent philosophers like Kant and Hegel also made critical study of language. According to Hegel language is the medium through which the subjective spirit mediates with the begins of objects. <sup>3</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> century it is the Ernest Cassirer who expanded the concept of language that includes the natural sciences, the humanities and all culture activities of human beings. He opines that the main feature of language is that it finds within itself its own criterion for truth and meaning. But his view is

narrow because he pre-supposes that language ,art and religion are parallel form of representation .<sup>4</sup> The difficulty occurs as all human knowledge is encompassed within language ,hence art and religion can't be a separate form of language ,rather their existence is possible within the language .So, Cassirer's view is not tenable.

The contemporary conception of linguistic thought has restricted the meaning of language to the printed word or material only and that too, if it corresponds one to one with the objective reality .It has reduced language to the uttered word only against the concept of idealistic thinkers .K .Klostermaier rightly observes 'the approach of linguistic thought sees the word only as a carrier of information and basically studies those aspects of language as a carrier of information and basically studies those aspects of language that a computer can store and retrieve .....The spoken word contains many dimensions that are inaccessible to the computer ;dimensions we perceive when we labour to produce the right words for a thought ;when we find ourselves struck by the appropriateness of a great poet's language ;or when we rejoice in coining a word that seems to express uniquely what we feel. <sup>5</sup>

These days the computer like function of language is highly appreciated but modern linguists prefer to consign all other dimensions of the word to the unreality of a mystic silence. <sup>6</sup> They say that either the word is factual and scientific in its referent or it is mystical and it has no real function in life .If we bifurcate and divide language in this way then modern man is deprived of its fullness and the varied potentials and dimensions that language can manifest in all its fullness.

If we come across to the study of language in Indian perspective then it is found that Indian linguistic speculations started by the Hindus much before the advent of recorded history ,beginning ,with the Vedic hymns ,which is said to be 3000 years old. <sup>7</sup> Indian thinking about Language was never restrictive .Indian sages and seers accept that all aspects of the world and human experience were thought of as illuminated and manifested only through language .Indian tradition postulates and pre –supposes that language contains both phenomenal and metaphysical dimensions .It is interesting to note here that in a hymn of Rg –veda ,a semi technical vocabulary is seen to have developed to deal with such linguistic matters like language composition

,inspiration ,illumination etc. <sup>8</sup> Indian thinkers paid equal care and attention to the inner (metaphysical) and the outer (phenomenal) aspects of language .They did not commit any mistake which the western thinkers did about the linguistic speculation. Indian neither accept nor reduce language only to the factual referents nor devaluate the meaning of human words that language will end up as obscure mysticism. <sup>9</sup> The great Grammarians like Panini and Maharshi Patanjali along with etymologist like Yaska were the main propounders who were clearly concerned with human speech in the everyday empirical world. But apart from the empirical world they also studied language from metaphysical point of view. The great Indian exponent and father of linguistic trend. Bhartrihari, starts his book Vakyapadiya with a metaphysical question about the nature and origin of language in relation to Brahman but after a query he explores technical grammatical points involved in the day to day use of language. <sup>10</sup>

The potentiality of language lies in dealing with common human things along with the metaphysical ground of creativity. It is a clear and distinct perspective of Indian thinkers in comparison to their western counterparts that the Indians are more insightful and encompassing than the western thinkers are. It can be seen or observed here in the saying of Klostermaier 'The great creative geniuses of India, men like Gautam Buddha or Shankara, took care to explain their thoughts not as creation but as a retracing of forgotten eternal truth. They compared their activity to clear an overgrown ancient path in the jungle, not to make a new path. <sup>11</sup>

The term 'creative efforts' that the seers or composer of the world means here, is not to bring out his own imagination but on the contrary, to renourish the forgotten eternal truth. It is in this specific Indian perspective that the philosophical analysis of language is taken as intellectual activity which combines eternal truth as well as day to day objects and events.

Language has been assigned an important place in the ancient literature of human civilization. In the Veda, it has been used to illustrate and describe in the support of gods. The composers of Veda first of all established the first inception of language by setting up names. They traced the course of language through ritual.

- i) Language and meaning are manifested and widely distributed by the seers and sages. They saw and heard with clear understanding that self-revealing language provides deep intuitions.
- ii) The man who does not perceive language in its fullness due to his ignorance and limitations, for him it is hidden and mysterious and listens wrongly without any clear understanding.<sup>13</sup> This particular hymn of the Veda says that the nature and function of language is to manifest the meaning of things. Language has been identified here with 'Brahman'. It has been accepted that there are as many words as manifestation of the divine.<sup>14</sup> This type of view continued in the later Granthas/Scriptures of the Hindu. In the Upanishads, speech has been termed as Brahman.<sup>15</sup>

Surprisingly, a good sense of equality is seen in the Brahmanical scriptures and that of the Christians where both accept that in the very outset the word itself was God. It is supposed here that speech and the divine co-exist. But there is a note of significant difference also that Christianity conceives an absolute beginning of order when God speaks and through His speech creates<sup>16</sup> but the Brahmanical view believes in a cyclic concept of creation with no absolute beginning. It asserts the cyclic concept of creation and dissolution and after each dissolution a seed is left out from which the next cycle originates. The nature of the seed is described as the divine word. Different symbols are used to indicate the divine nature of speech. The Vedas take language as *daivik vak*

According to Maharshi Aurobindo Ghosh the language of the Veda is rhythm; it has not been composed by the intellect but has been heard; a divine word that came vibrating out of the infinite to the inner audience of the man who had previously made it himself for the impersonal knowledge.<sup>17</sup>

The Indian concept of language was contained the form of seed in the Veda but it was developed in its full form and entirely in the *Pratisakhya*s which mention the rule for language. In the old Indian tradition language was thought to be true and most fully experienced and was received in its verbal or real form. The written word form has been accepted as a secondary thing which was developed for heuristic teaching purpose. It is said that written words are tools for the people who cannot remember the text by heart. The *Pratisakhya*s are important for preserving the oral or verbal form in its pure form of presentation. Indian tradition accepts that language is alive only when it is

spoken. The Vedic texts require the ability and potentiality to speak. Indian view lays stress on the spoken form of language. It has been said that thinking is internal speaking; writing is a coded record which does not perfectly represent all the nuances of the spoken word. Writing is always secondary. Indian and modern western views about the relationship between written and spoken language is quite in contrast to the west. In modern context, the earliest available manuscript has searched out and then it is used as the criterion to verify the modern text. The modern critic points out that the old texts were preserved and were conveyed from one generation to another through oral transmission. But later on, the text was modified in the present day keeping in mind the constraints of time, space and other requirements. The method and process of oral transmission has been considered unreliable due to its incompleteness and the inability to carry the original texts forward in their pure and unchangeable forms.<sup>18</sup>

But contrary to the western view, Pratisakhyas in India, maintained and continued pure oral presentation of the Vedas for many years and also from generation to generation, under the strict supervision of learned and wise teachers in an unbroken oral tradition. This custom was not dead or extinct rather made out of clear, distinct and correct speaking of the word a living language. It can be said that books in written form cannot be termed as true knowledge in the strict sense of the word. From the Indian point of view, such type of knowledge serves the purpose of only understanding. The Pratisakhyas are training rules for the oral learning of language, which preserve the Vedic word in its pure form.

The study of grammar and the concept of language occupy a pivotal place in Indian thought and this tradition has continued from the Vedic age to the present one. The first hypothesis and formation of Sanskrit grammar is found in the earliest Pratisakhyas. Sanskrit occupied a dominant and prominent place as a language from an early age upto 1000 A.D. A regular grammar was evolved and developed during this period. This was the natural and evolved outcome of the spoken language.<sup>19</sup> In Indian literature, the Nirukta of Yaska is the oldest etymological text. Panini came after Yaska and is known as a great grammarian. Patanjali wrote important commentary on Panini's sutras. The main aim of the grammarians was to bring out the intended meaning. In the words of Yaska, it is to get the real meaning of an uttered word.<sup>20</sup> These

grammarians endeavored to discipline and explain the behaviour of a spoken language so that the intended and inner meaning may come out clearly without any hindrance.

The Indian speculation of language started with the intended meaning of language. The prominent figures of the Indian galaxy, who worked on these lines are Mandan Mishra , Kumarila ,Kaundabhatta, Abhinav Gupta, etc. But undoubtedly Bhartrihari occupies the apex position among all. Bhartrihari in his book Vakyapadiya has conceived that the outer word form has to be united with the inner meaning . He propounded the sphota theory of meaning. The term sphota originates from the word sphut meaning to burst forth. Sphota is the idea that bursts out or flashes on the mind when a sound is uttered. <sup>21</sup>

The germ of sphota theory of language can be traced out in the early Vedic period, where speech was taken as a manifestation of the all pervading Brahman. The mantra AUM is regarded as the primordial speech sound form and it is from this, all forms of vak are said to have evolved. At the very outset of vakyapadia, Bhartrihari restates these very teachings as the foundation for this own view. <sup>22</sup> The unitary sphota is manifested as a series of uttered sounds which are the tools of expression and communication.

The manifestation may vary in form and style from man to man, place to place and time to time, but it is a truth that it is expressed throughout. Bhartrihari's treatment of language is quite different based on sphota . According to his theory of language , the sphota meaning the whole, is something over and above the uttered to written letters. <sup>23</sup> It is clear that the individual letter sounds vary with the speaker but there lies a feature which is common to all speakers that letters are uttered only for the purpose of manifesting the changeless sphota which resides within the speaker and it is present within the consciousness of every hearer in potential form. The expression are simply various outer manifestations of the one internal sphota. The process of communication has been clearly explained in the following way-

‘At first the word exists in the mind of the speaker as a sphota when he utters it, he produces a sequence of different sounds so that it appears to have differentiation. The hearer, although first hearing a series of sounds, ultimately perceives the utterance as a unity- the light bulb coming on image of cartoon. This ah ha! Experience of the hearer is his mental perception of the same sphota

with which the speaker begins, and it is then that the meaning of the word first seen by the speaker is also known by the hearer. Contrary to the other theories, Bhartrihari's view is that meaning is not conveyed from the speaker to the hearer, rather the spoken words serve only as the stimulus to reveal the meaning which was already, present in the mind of the hearer. <sup>24</sup>

The essential idea of the speech is produced which is inherently present in the speaker's consciousness and in the consciousness of each and every person. The speaker at first moment of its revelation is completely nabbed into the unitary idea. But when the speaker starts to evaluate the idea with an eye to its communication he withdraws himself from the first intimate unity with the idea and now experiences it in a two fold ways. On the one way it contains objective meaning, which the speaker seeks to communicate and on second way it has words and phrases that will be uttered. These two aspects are known as word-sound and word-meaning, i.e. dhvani and artha. According to Bhartrihari these two aspects are differentiated in the mind but are integrated parts which constitute the sphota. Bhartrihari gives emphasis on revelatory function of this two aspects unity. In his opinion the sphota is eternal and inherent in consciousness. <sup>25</sup> At once it cannot be grasped, but when repeatedly uttered or used in different words in an attempt to communicate the same idea, then clear and distinct cognition of sphota is cognized. Ultimately, the hearer has complete and clear cognition of the entire sphota and its two aspects. It has been described by Bhartrihari as an example of special perception. In a specific sense sphota may be defined as the transcendent ground in which spoken syllabus and the conveyed meanings are united. Mandana Mishra also illustrates Bhartrihari's theory of sphota with the analogy of a jeweler who examines the genuineness of precious stone.

Language is a distinctive feature of human consciousness and a medium of all human knowledge and communication. Modern western trend of scientific study of language concentrates its attention on the outer words but Indian speculation of language asserts that the nature of the language may be more complex and powerful. The oral based tradition and custom of language is significant to pave the way for further examination of language in Indian perspective. Now, it can be concluded that the primary unit of language is the meaning as a whole and its physical manifestation as a series of uttered words is secondary. The uttered word has no independent entity apart from the sentence.

The two aspects dhvani and artha are only differentiated in the buddhi (intellect) and still they are integrated like two sides of the same coin that constitute the sphota. Meaning is communicated by the progressive revelation of the inherent vakya-sphota as the padas are uttered. Thus, it is clear and evident that the oral emphasis on the Indian approach to language has remarkably shaped the kind of grammar and philosophy that has developed.

Now, it is clear from the above discussion that according to Bhartrihari language functions on at least two levels. The first level is the intuitive flash like understanding of the meaning of the sentence as a whole and the second level is the uttered sounds which go together to constitute the sentence. The latter is known as outer speech (vaikhari vak) and the former is known as inner speech (pasyanti vak). In between the two levels there lies a middle speech known as madhyama vak. It represents the level of thought. Bhartrihari opines that language passes through these three levels wherever the speaker speaks. Bhartrihari says that the whole is prior to the part and it results in an ascending hierarchy of speech dealing which ultimately is identified with Brahman.

Language is a mode of communication expressed through speech organs. In accordance with western studies, human beings express through it their thoughts, desire, emotion, feelings and stored knowledge. Language transmits message, experience and knowledge. Through language human beings store knowledge and communicate it to next generations. Up to external level eastern and western thought of language is identical. Indian thought of language examines internal domain of language and proceeds up to supreme knowledge. Western study is limited to external speech (vaikhari vaci). Middle stage of language (madhyama) leads towards upper level of insight (pasyanti) which flashes in the mind and provides new ideas. Most of the inventions of science are entirely related to this transitive stage (pasyanti). Supreme knowledge is without beginning and end. It is permanent. Seers visualized the supreme stage of language which revealed the present, past and future and which can be achieved through intensive practice of yoga. Obviously western study of language is limited to mundane word while Indian thought reveals spiritual universe of knowledge.



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