

Chapter-III

Śabdabrahman interpreted by Bhartṛhari

In this chapter an attempt has been made to examine the reasons for designating *Śabda* as *Brahman* by Bhartṛhari along with other considerations. In this context the cognitive and metaphysical background of Bhartṛhari's philosophy has been shown. The word *Śabda* has been used in different senses in different contexts. In general, *Śabda* is used in the sense of sound (*dhvani*) of any kind, which is perceived by the auditory sense organ. According to the *Nyāya* philosophy *Śabda* is used in the sense of a sentence spoken by a reliable person (*āptavākyam*), which is taken as testimony. But the term *Śabda* has been used by Bhartṛhari and all other Grammarians in technical sense. In Grammar *Śabda* stands for word manifested by *dhvani* (sound). Patañjali has used the term *Śabda* in three different senses, such as, a mere sound, meaningful word and the conceptual sound entity, otherwise known as *Sphoṭa*¹. Bhartṛhari asserted that sound does not express the meaning; but it reveals the significant word which he designated as *sphoṭa*. According to him *Śabda* is a totality of two i.e. the inner meaning revealing unit that is *sphoṭa* and the verbal noises that is *dhvani*. The former is the nature of awareness and the latter is the tool of revealing the former. Actually, Bhartṛhari opined that both the verbal noises and the expresser are involved in the accomplishment of communication. The speaker for the purpose of sharing his views employs a sentence comprising words uttered in a sequence. The word itself comprises letters that follow one after the other.

According to Bhartṛhari *Sphoṭa* is considered as real *Śabda*. Bhartṛhari classified *Vāk* into subtle and gross forms of which *Paśyantī* is the subtle form of *Vāk* while *madhyamā* and *vaikharī* are its gross forms². *Paśyantī* is often referred to as *Śabdabrahma*. *Paśyantī* is inaudible and beyond the range of the physical ear. *Madhyamā* is an intellectual process,

during which the speaker becomes aware of the word as it arises and takes form within him and he grasps it. *Vaikhari* is the articulated speech that is heard and apprehended by the listener. These three forms of speech are said to represent *icchāśakti*, *jnanaśakti* and *kriyāśakti*.

The ancient Grammarians are seen to use the term '*dhvani*' to denote the sound of an utterance that reaches the ears of the listener. *Dhvani* therefore is the vehicle of a word and is determined by the nature of the *varṇas* composing it. Some Indian aestheticians such as, Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta used the term *dhvani* to imply the subtle mood or the *rasa* evoked by a poem or a gesture in a play or in dance. According to Bhartṛhari *dhvani* is the auditory aspect of the *Śabda*. The intellect of the listener grasps *dhvani* in a flash. The *sphoṭa* is therefore the intellectual and inaudible aspect of the *Śabda*. Bhartṛhari used the term *sphoṭa* to indicate the meaning; and *dhvani* to refer to the uttered and heard sound. Bhartṛhari maintained a difference between *sphoṭa* and *dhvani* out of which the former is a cognitive being and the latter is the instrumental only in manifestation of the former. The latter is perceived as verbal – noises while the former is revealed. The *sphoṭa* is known directly as revealed in the mind and it is the *Śabda* at *madhyamā* level, the middle stage in the metaphysics of *Śabda* principle. The *Śabda* at this level is not an ontological but a cognitive being. In Sanskrit Grammar *Śabda* stands for the word manifested by *dhvani*. While *dhvani* is variable *Śabda* is not. The purpose of the *dhvani* is to give expression to and to act as a vehicle for *vāk*. The *dhvani* as perceived by the intellect of the speaker in a flash is *sphoṭa*. The *sphoṭa* is the intellectual impression of the audible sound patterns. The *Śabda* therefore combines in itself the physical form of word and its intellectual inaudible form.

Bhartṛhari maintained that *Śabda* does not mean any articulated verbal form but pure consciousness for which he has also chosen another expression, viz, *sphoṭa*. *Śabda* or *sphoṭa* is the self-luminous identity. Bhartṛhari said that every bit of knowledge is, in its state of

manifestation, intertwined with *Śabda* and that there cannot be any knowledge in which *Śabda* does not figure³. The evolution of *Śabda* runs in two lines *Śabda-vivarta* and *artha-vivarta*⁴. The speech sound represents the former type of evolution while the other type is represented by the whole host of objects. Bhartrhari has used the term *Śabda* in the following five senses: speech, word, *sphoṭa* word, sound and one of the means of knowledge⁵. Bhartrhari assumed two types of words: mental and audible. The mental word is an abstract form known as *sphoṭa* whereas the audible word is a phonetic form known as *dhvani* or *nāda*. According to him there is a cause and effect relationship between these two types of words. If viewed from the speakers point, the abstract form is the cause of phonetic form. When a speaker intends to speak, he first selects a word related to a particular meaning in his mind and then expresses it with the help of articulated sound. The articulation of sound is done in sequence and in parts.

Bhartrhari in his *Vākyapadīya* and *Mahābhāṣya Dīpikā* dealt with the *dhvani* theory in detail. According to him, the physical audible sound manifests the *sphoṭa*, which is nothing but the mental articulated image of the sound through which the meaning is conveyed to the listener. Thus *dhvani* is the physical body of the word, whereas *sphoṭa* is the conceptual entity of sound⁶. Bhartrhari made a new distinction within the manifesting sounds (*dhvani*); *Prākṛta dhvani* and *Vaikṛta dhvani*⁷. *Prākṛta dhvani* is that without which the form of *sphoṭa* would remain un-manifested and therefore unperceived. *Prākṛta dhvani* is considered to be the root cause of *sphoṭa* because as soon as we hear the *prākṛta dhvani*, *sphoṭa* is perceived. The second type of *dhvani* arises out of the *prākṛta dhvani* after the manifestation of *sphoṭa*, and therefore does not affect the quality of *sphoṭa*. It can be perceived again and again uninterruptedly for a longer period of time. An important feature of sound (*dhvani*) is its fixed capacity to express a particular phoneme. For instance, a particular sound, produced by its particular articulated efforts, reveals a particular phoneme. *Dhvani* is a divisible entity. It

is produced and grasped in a particular sequence and generally by mistake the same qualities of sound are superimposed on *sphoṭa*.

On the basis of the above discussion it can be said that *Śabda* which in general sense meant sound was later used by the Grammarians to denote different levels of the speech, such as, articulate sound, word, *sphoṭa*, and the speech itself. Bhartṛhari raised the word to the level of ultimate reality, as all human experiences are intertwined with the word. The word is said to be the principle cause of existence. Patañjali and Bhartṛhari speak of two types of words such as mental and audible. The mental word popularly known as the *sphoṭa*, is the abstract form of audible word, whereas the audible word popularly known as *dhvani* is the manifestation of the mental word. Bhartṛhari has elucidated the relation between *sphoṭa* and *dhvani* by explaining it from the standpoint of the speaker as well the listener. His theory about the explanation of the *dhvani-sphoṭa* relationship is very significant as it provide the solution to some of the linguistic problems.

Bhartṛhari propounded a philosophy similar to Śaṅkara's *Advaitavāda*. According to the philosophy of Bhartṛhari *Śabdabrahman* (*Logos*) is the Ultimate Reality out of which knowing souls, known objects and experience come. *Śabdabrahman* is modified into the world of objects with the aid of time. Identity in *Śabdabrahman* is real, and plurality in it is imaginary. It creates the root sound *Aum*, which is modified into the manifold world. There are no cognitions devoid of words, and there are no words devoid of cognitions. Words are non-different from the objects denoted by them. Natural sounds, modified sounds or words, cognitions and objects all are modifications of one eternal *Logos* (*Śabdabrahman*) or *Sphoṭa*, which is self-luminous. Distinctions of subjects and objects, cognitions, names and objects, are attributed to *Śabdabrahman* due to *avidyā*. The *Logos* (*Śabdattva*) is the Infinite Self devoid of *avidyā*. It appears as a finite self (*jīva*) subject to *avidyā*. There is one, eternal, self-

luminous *Sphoṭa* or *Śabdabrahman* (*Logos*) underlying the empirical world of a plurality of finite selves and diverse objects.

There is not even a single idea devoid of word, as all ideas are necessarily known as accompanied by them. If cognitions were not attended with words, they would not have been manifested⁸. Words manifest cognitions. Cognitions are in the nature of words, which are manifested as cognitions in consciousness. Language and meaning or thought are not two different entities⁹. In fact they are identical. So the question of separating one from another simply does not arise. But yet we separate one from another just to understand each other's speech and to communicate. This is nothing but instrumental to our mutual understanding. Ultimately, they are one and the same.

The view of Bhartṛhari can be properly understood only through the reference to his theory of *Sphoṭa*. But his theory of *sphoṭa* is so difficult and so vast that it is almost impossible to explain it within a short span of space. We shall give here just hints of the same. Bhartṛhari's theory of *Sphoṭa* can be represented in a better way by contrasting with that of the other philosophers. The theory of *Sphoṭa* is regarded as one of the most important contributions to the principal problems of general linguistics and of the philosophy of language. What is language? Some of the Indian grammarians say in reply that language is *sphoṭa*. *Sphoṭa* is the real language and the real vehicle of meaning. A word or a sentence, this theory holds, is not simply a concatenation composed of different sound-units arranged in a particular order, but a single whole or a single symbol bearing a meaning.

It is worthy to mention that though *sphoṭa* is said to be a language, it is language not used and understood in ordinary sense. The *sphoṭa* does not mean the articulate and audible sounds which we use in any particular discourse. One is the reveler and the other is revealed. The audible sounds are the means in terms of which, the symbol, the *sphoṭa* is revealed. The

sphoṭa theory maintains that language is also comprehended, but this comprehension of the meaning can only be possible through the comprehension of the *sphoṭa*.

The etymological meaning of the term '*sphoṭa*' also will help us to understand the *sphoṭa* theory to some extent. The term '*sphoṭa*' is derived from the root '*Sphut*' which means manifested, displayed, burst forth, and expressed etc¹⁰. Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa in his *Śphoṭavāda* interpreted it as that by which meaning is revealed¹¹. Thus the literal meaning of *sphoṭa* is that from which the meaning is bursts forth. In explaining the etymological meaning of the term '*sphoṭa*' Mādhava in his *Sarvadarśanasamgraha* said 'bursts' means 'to make explicit'; so the meaning of *sphoṭa* is what is made explicit by letters on the one hand, and what, being made explicit, makes the meaning explicit on the other hand. So, the *sphoṭa* stands for what, in being itself revealed in terms of letters or sounds, conveys the meaning to the hearer. According to some Ideologists, the *sphoṭa* is a 'mysterious entity'. This is because of the fact that Bhartṛhari's general philosophy associates the concept of *Brahman* with the essence of speech and *sphoṭa*. Sometimes Bhartṛhari used the terms *Śabda* and *sphoṭa* inter-changeably. Patañjali maintained that *sphoṭa* is the 'speech' or 'language' (*Śabda*) while the noise or sound (*dhvani*) is a quality of the speech. The audible parts of language are dependent upon the speaker, so these parts are determined by the particular style of delivering the speech by the speaker, but the *sphoṭa* is independent of the speaker, so it remains always constant being unaffected by the particularities of the particular speaker¹². The former part, i.e. the audible part may be soft or loud, or long or short, the latter part remains the same. The *sphoṭa* is an unit of sound, a single letter or a letter series. *Vyādi*, a great teacher, possibly a contemporary of Pāṇini in his work *Samgraha* has distinguished two faces of language, original sound (*Prākṛta-dhvani*) and transformed sound (*Vaikṛta-dhvani*)¹³. Bhartṛhari said that the 'original sound' is what causes our perception of the latter, but the transformed sound accounts for the differences in particularities in style of utterance, loudness and so on¹⁴.

Now let us come to the *sphoṭa*-theory of Bhartṛhari which is different from that of the others already mentioned to a great extent. In *Vākyapadīya* Bhartṛhari dealt with the doctrine of *sphoṭa* theory. Bhartṛhari's doctrine of *sphoṭa* is of three fold namely; *varna-sphoṭa*, *pada-sphoṭa* and *vākya-sphoṭa*¹⁵. The *sphoṭa* as described by Bhartṛhari is partless and indivisible having no internal sequence¹⁶. Bhartṛhari stated that a *pada-sphoṭa* i.e. a *sphoṭa* in the form of word is a meaning-bearing unit. The *Vākya-sphoṭa*, i.e. the *sphoṭa* in the form of sentence, which is the most important among the three, is a primary meaning-bearing element too. *Vākya-sphoṭa* is sequence less or part less whole which gets expressed or manifested in a sequential and temporary utterance. One of the eminent scholars Bimal Krishna Matilal said that 'meaning-bearing unit' is a wrong term. According to him, *sphoṭa* is not different form but identical with meaning. So language cannot be considered to be vehicle of meaning. Thought anchors language and language anchors thought. Language is thinking and thought 'vibrates' through language. So, language and meaning or thought can't be separated, as they are identical.

The predecessors of Bhartṛhari said of two aspects of language. Bhartṛhari himself mentioned these two aspects of language. He held that among the two aspects of language one is the linguistic unit properly understood, the real language, and the other is what 'manifested' or 'expressed' it. Bhartṛhari and some of his followers related this duality to what Matilal called the *sphoṭa-nāda* distinction of language. *Nāda* manifests *sphoṭa* and *Sphoṭa* conveys meaning. The *sphoṭa* is a whole having no parts. *Sphoṭa* must be made explicit to make communication possible between the speaker and the hearer. But *sphoṭa* can't be made explicit without the aid of *nāda*, the casual factor for making *sphoṭa* explicit. In fact *sphoṭa* has no parts and sequence but it is when the speaker utter *nāda* in particular sequence and it expresses *sphoṭa* in sequence and part by part then *sphoṭa* this way falsely appears to have parts and temporal sequences in the same way in which the moon reflected in wavy waters

appears to be wavy and disintegrated¹⁷. Thus some spurious attributes are superimposed on the *sphoṭa*. The *sphoṭa* of the speaker is made explicit by the sounds uttered by him. But by the sounds made by the speaker the *sphoṭa* of the hearer is ‘awakened’ because the one and the same *sphoṭa* is also shared by the hearer.¹⁸

We think, Bhartṛhari’s philosophical inquiry is actually a cognitive analytic inquiry into the nature of cognition and communication. For him, the real is the intelligible being or idea which revealed non-differently in the mind by language. He accepted language as a unit of distinct and self-determinate cognition or as a revealing force of awareness. According to Bhartṛhari the existence of Beings that is things-in-themselves is actually an ontological substratum of the cognition and of the objects of cognition revealed in the mind by language. We think, Bhartṛhari did not speculate into the problem of Reality on the basis of mystical experience. He interprets the problems from the point of view of cognition as revealed in the mind by language. For him, the outside reality is inferred on the basis of the cognition revealed by language. We think, Bhartṛhari was not interested in the ontic nature of things. He discussed about the transcendental Beings as the ontological substratum of beings expressed by language in mind that is cognitive beings and this cognitive being is actually the unit of awareness in nature. For him, language is actually the revealing force of awareness. So, it can be said that the *paśyantī* level of language which is known as *Śabdabrahman* is the revealing force of awareness and because of this awareness the outside reality is inferred. Finally it can be said that the source of the entire world of individual things which consists only in *nāma* and *rūpa* is the *Śabdabrahman* which is the ultimate Reality mentioned by Bhartṛhari. So, on the basis of the above discussion it is clear that the philosophical approach of Bhartṛhari is a cognitive one. He investigated beings from the point of view of cognition and not from the point of view of finding a Reality as its substratum.

So, it is clear to us that according to Bhartṛhari Philosophy is a cognitive activity and Philosophy is concerned with language primarily as a cognitive activity because according to him cognition is always infused by language. We think, Bhartṛhari wanted to show that as only ideas can be revealed in the mind by language, ideas are the objects of cognition and these objects of cognition are infused by language. The primacy of language in cognitive activities is most important. So, following Bhartṛhari it can be said that no knowledge can be possible without language and every knowledge is revealed by language. That is why Bhartṛhari claimed that language, thought and cognition, all of the three are identical. Actually Bhartṛhari's view on ultimate Reality i.e. *Śabdabrahman* is a cognitive one. We think, Bhartṛhari accepts language as the object of philosophical reflection because cognition can be revealed by language. According to him without language thought is not possible. But it is important to note that the term 'language' has been used by him in technical sense. Here language means inner meaning revealing language i.e. *sphoṭa* and this inner meaning revealing language is common to all of us. If we follow Bhartṛhari's Philosophical view then the idea of private language does not arise. Because the inner meaning revealing language i.e. *sphoṭa* is ubiquitously given in the mind of all individuals. It is articulated variously through verbal utterances. The essential feature of language is to participate in a linguistic society and it can be possible only because of ubiquity of language that reveals cognition. But it is important to note that though Bhartṛhari accepted inner meaning revealing language i.e. *sphoṭa* as the foundational being of the world of communication, he also gave importance to verbal utterances as the instrument through which *sphoṭa* can be manifested. So, according to Bhartṛhari verbal utterances and inner meaning revealing language are inseparably involved.

The Philosophical inquiry of Bhartṛhari about the nature of language and reality culminates in the idea of *Śabdabrahman* and it stands as the ground of all phenomenal multiplicities and changes. The principle of language is identified with the reality i.e. *Śabdabrahman* and it is a

form of monism in which Bhartṛhari established his philosophical thought. Bhartṛhari traditionally directed his intellectual activity towards the realization of the ultimate knowledge. The ultimate reality i.e. *Śabdabrahman* manifested itself as the phenomenal word because of its many powers (*śakti*) but it is important to note that the powers of ultimate reality are not different from its source. So, it can be said that without losing its oneness the ultimate reality manifests itself as many. Our knowledge of everything is intertwined with the word and without cognizing the word first we cannot cognize an object. As all manifestations of *Brahman* are intertwined with word, *Brahman* must be of the nature of the word i.e. it must be *Śabdātattva*. But it is worthy to note that the term *Śabda* in the philosophy of Bhartṛhari has been used in a technical sense. It is conceived as the very consciousness and this very consciousness in the ultimate sense of the term is the inner indivisible linguistic form i.e. *Śabdabrahman*. Bhartṛhari in his *Vākyapadīya* declared that *Śabdabrahman* is the ultimate reality and he has given explanation to show how the creation of the world proceeds from that ultimate reality i.e. *Śabdabrahman*. Assuming the word form all phenomena manifests itself as the uttered phonemes for the purpose of communication. The phenomenal world is described as consisting of three things, the experience, the things experienced and the experience itself.

Bhartṛhari maintained that *Śabdabrahman* is the ultimate reality out of which the phenomenal world comes out. But here a pertinent question arises how the world comes into being out of the *Śabdabrahman*? Śaṅkarāchārya held that the world appears out of the *Brahman* due to *māyā* underlying it. But what's about the answer given by Bhartṛhari, in this regard? Bhartṛhari said in reply that *Śabdabrahman* appears as the world because of its *Kālaśakti*. So *Kālaśakti* in the philosophy of Bhartṛhari stands for *māyā* in the philosophy of Śaṅkarāchārya. Thus it is seen that Bhartṛhari equated *māyā* with *Kālaśakti* which leads one to surmise that phenomenal existence. Bhartṛhari accepts *Kālaśakti* as the divine power. It is

the efficient cause by which *Brahman* controls the cycles of universe. The phenomenal world is the manifestation of one and the same *Śabdabrahman*. Now the question is, is this phenomenal world a case of *vivarta* or is it something else? In reply to this question eminent scholars have given their views taking this as a serious matter of their study. Gaurinath Sāstri argued that as Bhartṛhari did not believe in any real change of *Śabdabrahman*, the status of the phenomena –words in relation to *Śabdabrahman* could not be adequately characterized by either *parināma* or *vivarta*. So, the sāmkhya conception of *parināma* and the conception of Śaṅkara of *vivarta* is ruled out. So, if we agree with the view of Saṅtri then we can realize that Bhartṛhari did not conceive of any difference between *Śabdabrahman* and its *śaktis*. For Bhartṛhari *Śabdabrahman* and its power both of the two are actually identical. So, the concept of *vivarta* is not applicable in his philosophy as he seen no difference between diversity of phenomena in relation to the unitary Absolute. Actually, Saṅtri claimed that, for Bhartṛhari the phenomenal manifestation of *Śabdabrahman* and its power (*śakti*) are identical with the ultimate reality (*Śabdabrahman*). Their relationship is described on the analogy of the mirror and its reflections. The phenomenal manifestation of *Śabdabrahman* is nothing but the reflection of it and it is the *ābhāsas* of it which can have no independent existence without the ultimate reality i.e *Śabdabrahman*.

K.A.S Iyer observed that Bhartṛhari's opinion, in this respect is not different from the traditional *Vedānta* doctrine. Bhartṛhari opined that *Brahman*, the indivisible power can be interpreted in two different ways. One interpretation seems to be associated with Vājapāyana according to whom the persisting aspect of the word is universal which it connotes. According to this view though there are several universals like man, cow, dog etc. but over and above all these universals there is only one single ultimate universal king. All phenomenal word forms ultimately mean this universal king. The other interpretation comes from vyādi according to which the persisting substance being which is perceived is nothing

but the individual produced through a limitation (*upādhi*) of that unreal being. All universals taken in the ordinary language such as man, cow, horse are nothing but the appearances through the limitation of the ultimate being, *Śabdabrahman*. As these beings are the results of limitation (*upādhi*) they cannot be true. Thus, it is seen that the *Śabdabrahman*, the ultimate reality is the meaning of all limiting individual word-forms. *Śabdabrahman*, the ultimate reality is cognized through the unreal word-forms. Simply because of the unreal limiting factors are first denoted by words. In this way K.A.S Iyer shown that both of the interpretations are consistent with *vivartavāda*. So, the observations of Sastri in this regard cannot be accepted.

Sāntarakṣita, another eminent scholar expressed deliberately the word *parināma* as the real manifestation to explain the word *vivartate* occurring in it. It is claimed that manifestation is not real but affecting by *avidyā* or ignorance people look upon the one reality as many. So far as the observation made in *Vākyapadīya* 1.112 is concerned perhaps there is no difference in the meanings of the roots *parināma* and *vivarta*.

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