The Sphotavada of Language

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ABSTRACT: The theory of language is very inspirational topic. The sphota is the perfect gist of language and is the cornerstone of all linguistic process. Bhartrhari is the founder of sphotavada. Sphota is the original sound produced by various vocal organs with the contact of various places of articulation. I am discussing through this paper about the origin and development of language.

Key Words: Sphota, Language, Bhartrhari, Vakyapadiya, Language

I. INTRODUCTION

A language is a system of signs for encoding and decoding information. Human knowledge is originated from ‘Vak’. Concordant to the Indian tradition every branch of learning has a divine origin. “Even every process in nature, man is believed to have a divine touch; language, wisdom, etc. are due to the blessings of Sarasvati, the Goddess of Vak” [1]. ‘Bhartrhari’ glorifies in his ‘Vakyapadiya’, the greatness of the Goddess of speech. And he also asserts that it is ‘Vak’ alone created the entire Cosmos.

‘Bhartrhari’ is a great name in Sanskrit literature that lived in the 5th Century AD. He was also known as “Padavakyapramanajna”. Through his famous work Vakyapadiya, Bhartrhari depicts his deep knowledge of the central problems of semantics. ‘Trikandi’ is another name of Vakyapadiya, i.e. that which has three kandas- ‘Brahmakanda’ or ‘Agamakanda’, ‘Vakyakanda’ and ‘Prakirnakanda’. The metaphysical backgrounds of the Sphota doctrine are discussed in the beginning chapter ‘Agamakanda’. ‘Vakyakanda’ deals with the fundamental subject of semantics in general linguistics and figures out it on the basis of Sphota doctrine. The last chapter deals with the concept of the Ultimate essence – ‘akhandavakyasphota’. The output of sound (sabdavirbhava), comprehension (grahana), and communication (vinimaya) are the concepts that revolutionized by Bhartrhari. His analytical study surfaced the way for the rational doctrine namely ‘Sphotavada’.

The term ‘Sphota’ is derived from a Sanskrit root ‘Sput’, means bursting or opening. Patanjali defines Sphota as ‘sphutatyarthosmad’, i.e. which meaning is exploded. Bhartrhari applies various technical terms like ‘sabda’ or ‘sphota’, ‘dhvani’ and ‘nada’. Bhartrhari refers to ‘sabda’ or ‘sphota’ that the inner unity which conveys the meaning. The original source concept of sphota seems to have come from the Vedic time of Indian thought. It is noted that the term ‘Sphota’ has been referred firstly by ‘Panini’ in his pioneer work ‘Ashtadhyayi’. However, we get a fully developed and systematized description of the Sphotavada from the ‘Vakyapadiya’ of Bhartrhari.

The sphota is the perfect gist of language and is the cornerstone of all linguistic process. The etymological meaning of sphota is that which bursts. In this context, the gist of language which bursts itself is the sphota. It is the internal realness of the sentences which establish language. Bhartrhari formulates his sphota theory in order to show that without the internal realness of language there can be no arrant realizing of the meaning and operation of language.

II. ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE

According to Bhartrhari, sphota is the original sound produced by various vocal organs with the contact of various places of articulation [2]. The old Sanskrit grammarians treated sphota and dhvani in different theories. Bhartrhari
also mentioned about the theories in his Vakyapadiya. According to one view in Vakyapadiya, he said that the sphota is produced first and thereafter dhvani. Bhartrhari states in another theory that sphota and dhvani are producing simultaneously. This theory concedes that there is no gap at all in the yield of both. The sphota is the flame of fire and is the central part of sound. But the dhvani is the light of the flame. On certain occasions we see the light without seeing the flame. Likewise we hear dhvani without experiencing sphota. As the flame and light are produced at the same time so is the output of the sphota and the dhvani.

Bhartrhari explicates that dhvani has two faces viz. ‘prakrtadhvani’ and ‘vaikrtadhvani’. Prakrtadhvani is the original sound, which is the cause of sphota. But vaikrtadhvani is the pure phonetic term used by grammarians. It is the sound spoken by the speaker and heard by the listener. There is no partition of time in the sphota whereas there is interpolation of time in the reflections of this gist.

According to him, sphota signifies the audible sound or dhvani. Sphota controls within the Universal sounds whereas dhvani within a specific sound. In modern conditions sphota can be understood as having ceaseless typical phonetic characteristics. But dhvani is of a phonetic type. Sphota is that which is to be demonstrated and dhvani is demonstrating. Dhvani may be variable considering on the speakers style of vocalization. But sphota as the unit of speech is not capable to such fluctuations. Bhartrhari formulates the idea of sphota is a unique philosophical proportion. For him, sphota is neither a meaning abiding unit nor a linguistic mark.

Indian grammarians accept the four speech situations namely para, pasyanti, madhyama and vaikhari. But Bhartrhari does not accept the four level of ‘vak’ process. He accepts the three parts viz. pasyanti, madhyama and vaikhari [3]. Pasyanti is the latent stage of language. At this stage the distinction between the word-forms and meaning are not there. Madhya is the intermediate stage, where despite the identity of thought and language their distinction along with the distinctive elements of words and meanings are discernible. This stage is the ‘pre-verbal’ stage. And vaikhari is the ‘verbal’ stage [4]. Para is the most elusive form of speech and is realized only in the nirvikalpa samadhi. Hence Bhartrhari chooses only three relevant for his language analysis [5]. Sphota is the real cause of the Cosmos. Bhartrhari’s theory of sphota is also known as ‘sabdadvaita’ or ‘sabdatabhava’. He reveals this with mention to five aids to sensible knowledge viz. pratyaksha (perception), anumana (inference), agama (sabda), abhyasa (repetition) and adrsta (invisible) [6]. At the personal level, Sphota is the idea which twinkles on the mind when a sound is expressed. At the universal level, Sphota is the force behind the Word-Logos, the eternal declaring itself through sound. The absolute potentiality of the occurrence of life is charted in the sound of ‘Aum’, the pranava, that direct prana or breath.

The ‘Mandukyopanisad’ assorts the whole enigma of Brahmn into an elementary sound Aum, the three conditions of waking, dreaming and deep sleep allied to the three mantras of A, U and M, the Sphota, the Nada-Sabda Brahman being the “material of all words”. Vivekananda says that ‘Aum’ alone can be the particularized emblem of all desirable sounds.

Bhartrhari agrees that word and meaning are inseparable units. If we go to the theoretical sense of sphota, we can realize that the ‘word’ means sabdatattva (sound principle), arthatavatva (meaning principle) and pratibha (intuition). Words are grammatically the meaning abiding units and the higher or real sphota is the real word or sabda.

According to Bhartrhari, the term sabda is an equivalent word for sphota. The real word or the real sphota is the ‘Brahman’ itself and it is the Ultimate Reality, hence it bears for the akhandavakyasphota.

Bhartrhari believes that sphota is a two sided coin that is indivisible and changeless. One of its proportions is the sound form and the other is the meaning assuming unit. It is believed that sphota along with expressing the meaning also expresses itself [7]. This is expressed Bhartrhari by the verse 1:46.K.Kunjunni Raja interprets sphota as the linguistic sign in its meaning-bearing aspect [8]. Bhartrhari supposes that a word has a double power, i.e. a word can express both the meaning and the expressed thing.

III. CONCLUSION

Bhartrhari depicts that sphota is a monistic philosophy pertaining the fundamental trouble of the word and its meaning. He distinguishes two components in each important word, the component of sound (sabda) and the component of meaning (artha). The sphota is an inseparable meaning assuming unit of a word, which bluses on the mind when a sound is expressed. It is the sublime theoretical and transcendental speech effect. In the Veda’s, there are many expressions which prove that the concept of sphota has developed in Veda’s. Rig-Veda says that a” mahan devah sabdah”, which means the Great God, is speech itself.

Since Sphota assumes that the apparent Universe arose out of an exploding forth from the changeless substratum. It is also seen as the premature ‘Big Bang’ theory of the Universe, retroflexed in each individual mind as the possible
arousing of awareness through words and language. Sphotavada says that the very inwardness of the Universe is Sphota. The sound of speech (dhvani) apparently arouses the Sphota in the listener as varnasphota, padasphota, and vakyasphota, the phoneme-in-morpheme-diction-knowledge, the word-diction-knowledge, and the text-diction-knowledge, individually. According to Bhartrhari, the meaning is accomplished through vakyasphota only. Even today this theory is widely admits among modern linguists as the most arrant analysis into the deepness of language, making appreciable profoundness to the Philosophy of Language, Linguistics, and especially in Semiotics.

REFERENCE

[1]. Satapatha Brahmana, Vakvai sarasvati-2-5, 4-6.