

Shabda-Brahman: A Conceptual Study on Bhartrihari's Theory of Sphota

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Abstract: The Sanskrit term *Shabda* means word which is manifested by sound and a word has an innate power to carry a particular feeling and meaning. *Bhartrihari* spoke about the creative power of *shabda* and he also held that the universe is a creation of the *shabda-brahman*. *Shabda* is the *Brahman* which is a pure being, consciousness and bliss (*sat-chit-ananda*). It is the ultimate ground of all existence. *Brahman* is the original principle of this world. It has no beginning and end. The nature of *Brahman* is potential within the consciousness. *Brahman* is one but it has the power to manifest itself in various forms without losing its original form. *Brahman* is sound or *shabda* and sound or *shabda* is *sphota*, the royal road of liberation, which is the ultimate end of human life. Liberation means to realize *Brahman*. The objectives of this paper are to explore the ultimate end of human life and the way to achieve it. To identify the aspects of a language situation and to inquire how a person can understand the meaning of a word after hearing it in the perspective of *Bhartrihari*.

Key Words: *Shabda-Brahman, Liberation, Sphota, Consciousness, Reality etc.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The literal meaning of Sanskrit term *sphota* is to burst, sudden opening or disclosure. *Sphota* means that from which the meaning bursts forth. *Bhartrihari* was a monistic or *Advaitavadi* thinker, he explained *shabda* metaphysically in terms of monism or *Advaita Vedanta Darshana*. In *Vakyapadiya*, he says, as the fire manifests itself and reveals the object also, similarly, the *sphota* manifests itself and expresses the meaning of the *shabda*. For knowledge, *shabda* or sound is required and *shabda* is the essence of consciousness. Human beings become conscious by the sound or words. Words keep humans conscious. Human thoughts are expressed through words and these words originate in the human consciousness. Without consciousness there will be no sound or words. The sound or the words are the external form of consciousness. *Shabda* reveals latent and unexpressed emotions, feelings and thoughts. All forms of consciousness indicate the presence of *shabda*. *Shabda* is the integral part of consciousness. The ultimate reality is the *shabda* or sound from which all things are illumined and manifested. And the cause of existence of all things in this world is the *Shabda-Brahman*.

2. Shabda is Truth, Real and Brahman: The language we speak through meaningful words is the medium of expression of ultimate reality. By this word we perceive the external appearance of ultimate reality and its diversity. Reality here refers to the vivid truth that every human being must realize. The real comes out through the *shabda* and *shabda* is not only the revealer of reality, *shabda* is Truth, Real and *Brahman*. It is because of *Ichha* or will that *shabda* originates from consciousness.

3. Transformation of Thought: Thoughts are transformed into audible sound through three levels, namely, *Pashyanti*, *Madhyama* and *Vaikhari*.

Pashyanti: In the first level, *Pashyanti-vak* is a non-differentiated principle and identical with consciousness. It is the stage of *sphota*. Non-verbal thoughts naturally originate in the human mind. They exist latently in the

human mind. A person can visualize and introspect thoughts in his mind. This level is called *pashyanti*. It is the ultimate reality or form of *shabda-brahman*.

Madhyama: *Madhyama* is the next level, and at this level a person expresses his thoughts through the use of appropriate words by applying his intellect.

Vaikhari: And finally when speech is expressed in acoustic form by the mouth of the speaker, it is called *Vaikhari*. Two types of effort are needed to turn thoughts into words, namely, internal and external. *Pashyanti* and *Madhyama* are internal and *Vaikhari* is external efforts to transform the thoughts into *shabda*. *Pashyanti* and *madhyama* are the internal form of speech or word and *vaikhari* is the external form of speech. *Bhartrihari* compares the evolution of the universe to the transformation of words. *Pashyanti* is called *shabda-brahman* which is the first glimpse of *buddhi-vrittis* or intellect and which may be called *pratibha* or intuition also. *Pashyanti vac* is the vision –image of the world which is indivisible and the origin and purpose of speech. At this stage the word and the meaning of the word coexist and undifferentiated. *Pashyanti vac* is the direct experience of speech flow. It is the unmanifested state of the word, yet here resides the will to be manifested. This urge to be expressed gives impetus to the formation of *pashyanti vac*.

Madhyama speech level is the level where a person searches for, chooses and applies the appropriate words to express his thoughts. But this word or sound is not audible by others, because it is just a vibration or *spandan*. It is the stage where an individual speaks to himself. It is the stage at which ideas are organized before they are expressed verbally. All this action takes place within the individual. *Vaikhari* is to speak clearly at time and space. It is the expressed form of speech. The word *vikha* means body. So the *vaikhari* means outwardly manifested form of speech with the help of body and body parts.

4. Three Aspects of Language: There is a difference between words and sound, words are real speech. On the other hand, sound is the sound produced by the speaker while uttering a word. *Bhartrihari* identifies three aspects of language situation from the hearer's aspect viz. *vaikritadhvani*, *prakritadhvani* and *shpota*. When the speaker utters the words, the sound produced by the movement of the vocal organs at the time of utterance is called *vaikritadhvani*. The uttered pitch, tempo and sound may differ from person to person. When the speaker utters a word and the listener hears that word. The sound disappears because sound is temporal, yet the sound that remains in the listener's mind is called *prakritadhvani*. And the *sphota* is changeless and indivisible, an integral linguistic symbol which conveys the meaning and expressed by the *prakritadhvani*.

5. Shabda – the Medium of Liberation: *Shabda* or words are not only a medium of communication, but also a medium of spiritual knowledge and liberation. The power of understanding is latent in everyone, so when one person speaks another person can understand the meaning of the words. There is potential in everyone, there is *Brahman* in everyone, just like there is *sphota* in everyone. *Sphota* means the comprehension of the meaning lies already present in the hearer's awareness. The meaning of the word is present in the listener's mind, which is why he can understand the meaning of the word which is uttered. The word only serves only as a stimulus to reveal and uncover the meaning which is spoken by the speaker. That is called *pashyanti*. The word or *shabda* makes things and the *Brahman* creates the world so it can be said that the *shabda* is the creator of all things. *Bhartrihari* compares the word transformation with the world evolution of the *Advaita* philosophy.

6. Conclusion:

Shabda purifies the knowledge and it is the means and straight royal road of liberation which is the ultimate end of human life. Expressing and understanding the meaning of *shabda* or word is an innate and universal quality of every human being. There can be no sense or knowledge in this world without association with language. The journey from diversity to unity means to move from *avidya* or ignorance to *vidya* knowledge. When we see unity in the midst of diversity in this world, we are truly enlightened. From gold we can make different kinds of ornaments such as necklace, bracelet, ear-rings etc. though they have different forms but all are gold. Similarly, though there is diversity in this world, everything is created from *Brahman* or transformation of *Brahman*. Therefore all is *Brahman* – which is one, absolute and undivided. According to *Bhartrihari* Language, thought and reality is one.



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