

Bhartrhari on Meaning

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It is known that language is a means of communication. In case of linguistic communication the speaker, who expresses what he intends to say, uses phones i.e. single sound consonant or vowel (*Varna*), words (*Pada*) and sentences (*Vakya*) to convey his own Idea to another. But we know that sentence is a significant unit of language. If in any case we used phone or word to communicate any idea is also functions like a sentence in that context. We also know that the constituents of sentence or words.

Now the question arises here how individual words combine together to give meaning to a sentence? This is one of the great problems which have bother philosophers in both the East and the West from the early time to Philosophy. In other word how distinct entities like words with their separate meaning can unite together give a new meaning which is wholly different from what was presented in them originally? Again, how does one explain that the whole (the sentence) is not just the epistemologically sum of the parts (the words) composing the sentence?

Indian philosophers asked above questions and spent about thousand years trying to find an answer and even today the debate is going on they make so many great contributions in linguistic philosophy and ‘theory of sphota’ is one of them One of the answer of above described question is found in theory of sphota of Bhartrhari.

It will be the task of this paper to show in what way the problem of meaning described in linguistic philosophy briefly above, was answered by the sphota theorists specially Bhartrhari, a great Indian Grammarian of fifth century of the Christian era. Bhartrhari developed his theory of sphota in ‘*Vakyapadiya*’. In *Brahmkand* and *Vakyakanda* of ‘*Vakyapadiya*’ he gives a systematic explanation of sphota. Here we are dealing with the problem as, how from the diversity of words can be a unit of meaning come in to being? The problem arises that how one can get the meaning of a sentence from the words of sentence. The meaning of a sentences can’t be found in the separate word of the sentence taken individually so where is it?

Bhartrhari solved this problem of meaning by his theory of sphota as holistic theory or by sentence holism.

So we have arrived at the discussion of the determinant of meaning of a sentence. But before discussing it, I want to go to reformulate the discussion of Bhartrhari on the kinds of sentence.

In V.P. Canto-II he mention following categories of sentences¹

1. *Akhyatsabdovakyam* (आख्यातशब्दोवाक्यम्). The theorists following this view interpret Language in term of an imperative to do or not to do since an action is expressed by verb, they define verb a sentence.
2. *Sanghatovakyam* (संघातोवाक्यम्) A sentence is an association of words conveying a connected meaning.
3. *Sanghata varttinijativakyam* (संघातवर्तिनीजातिवाक्यम्) A sentence is the Universal inhering in an association of the words.
4. *Kramovakyam* (क्रमोवाक्यम्) Sequence of the words is sentence.

5. *Adyampadamvakyam* (आध्यामपदंवाक्यम्) The beginning word of a sentence is a sentence.
6. *Prthakasarvapadam* *Sakakasam* *Vakyam*
(पृथकसर्वपदंसाकाक्षंवाक्यम्) All words of a sentence are independently different sentences.
7. *Eko navayayah sabdah vakyam* (एकोअनवयवःशब्दःवाक्यम्) A sentence is the primary units of language.
8. *Buddhyanusonhrti vakyam* (बुद्ध्यनसंहर्ति वाक्यम्) A sentence is an inner, sequence less and meaning revealing unit.

In the above explained kinds of sentence Bhartrhari accepts only three of eight. He categories the above types of sentence in two :

- 1) *Khandpaksha* (Atomic view)
- 2) *Akhandapaksha* (Holistic view)

Bhartrhari classifies five of above defined sentences in *Khandapaksha* are 1,2,4,5,6 and three of them in *Akhandapaksha* are 3,7,8. According to *Khandapaksha* words are the basic unit of language and sentence is association of the words. Bhartrhari refutes the theory of *Khandapaksha* and establishes that sentence is the basic unit of language, not words. This view of sentence called *Akhandapakshya*.

The question arises now how Bhartrhari can say that the sentence is basic unit of language. It because of the fact that in the background of this assumption (The sentence is indivisible) sphota theory is working on. Now I am going to explain the theory of sphota according to Bhartrhari.

The first question is that what is sphota? According to Bhartrhari sphota is meaning bearing units and the unit of expression. Sphota is a real word. Real in the sense that meaning is revealed by it. It is an indivisible flash, a complete unit expressive of a complete meaning

satisfying further expectancy for a complete sense. It is inner word. It is the word that exists in the mind and is indivisible without inner sequence. Bhartrhari likens sphota to the light that reveals itself as well as the object that comes into contact with it.² Sphota, likewise reveals itself and at the time of self-revelation it reveals sounds as well. So, when it is said that sphota is revealed by sound. What is meant is that sounds that owe their genesis to sphota reveal it to other minds. Understood in this sense sphota does not forfeit its character of self-luminosity even though it is held that the same is revealed by sounds³ According to V.P. 1-44 there are two aspects of word : the first aspect is the cause of the real word while the other i.e. *dhavni* (sound) is used to convey the meaning.⁴ One may confuse that if *dhavni* (Sound) is convener of meaning then it will be the real word. To clarify this confusion we have to know that what is the process of communication of any Idea. The process is as follow: at first the word exists in the mind of the speaker as a unit or sphota. When he utters it produces a sequence of different wound so that it appears to have differentiation. The listener, though first hears a series of sound ultimately perceives the utterance as a unity the same sphota with which the speaker began and then the meaning is conveyed thus in beginning and in the end it is sphota and *dhvani* (Sound) is only a medium to transfer the meaning from speaker to listener.

In account of explaining the process of communication Bhartrhari maintains that a linguistic expression resides in human mind as speech potentials (*Shabdabija*) which passes through there stages end that are different sorts of speech. They are- *Pasyanti*, *Madhyama* and *Vaikhari*. *Pasyanti* is the inarticulate stage which is non- verbal as it is subtle; there is no occasion for any distinction of language and meaning at the *pasyanti*

level of speech. It is sequence less, pure unity and is manifested (hen one intends to speak) madhyama first and at the level of vaikhari. *Madhyama* is inner shabda, the being revealed in the mind when manifested by articulated utterance. It figures in or is revealed in the mind of the hearer after hearing the verbal noises and in the mind of speaker when they intend to speak.⁵ Bhartrhari has given utmost importance to madhyama because in the process of manifestation when madhyama becomes in mind it called sphota by which meaning reveled. Meaning in the madhayama stage, is non differently revealed in the mind and, hence there is non difference of sphota and meaning. The final stage is called uttered speech is *Vaikhari*. At this level non sequential seems in a sequence. In the above description we see that the sphota is a meaning reveling unit. The sphota is an inner unit of cognition and as such sequence less, individual, integral and complete meaning reveling units.

It is thought that speaker want to express sphota is manifested through articulated utterances produced in a sequence by speaker's effort when he intends to communicate.

From following description of sphota we may notice that Bhartrhari takes it (sphota) as inner and indivisible sentence (*Vakya*). The sentence is an expresser which expresses its meaning non differently⁶. According to the sphota theory of Bhartrhari it is the complete utterance of the sentence that is the unit, and it is called vakyasphota, but at a lower analytical level the word, can be considered as the unit for which term padasphota is used by the grammarian. Those who know the language very well think and speak in units of sentences and also hear whole sentences. It is only those who do not know the language properly hear words or phonemes or bits of sound and have to struggle with them to get

the connected sentence meaning. But in grammatical texts the words are taken as the unit for sake of easy understanding. Thus Bhartrhari appreciates the primacy of the sentence he recognized nevertheless the pragmatic value of the concept of word as an aid to the analytical method in grammar and philosophy.⁷

Thus the most proper speech unit to express the sphota is sentence. Sphota is indivisible and sentence is also indivisible. It is the sentence holism of Bhartrhari.

Now come to the point of sentence meaning. Bhartrhari is a sentential holist and has established the theory of sentential meaning as an indivisible unit, by refuting the constructionists we mean those who deny the independent being of sentence and try to interpret sentential meaning only on the basis of word meaning. The eight kinds of sentence which have been above described five of them that held constructionist theory of sentence meaning. Bhartrhari has mentioned at least give types such theories grouped by Punyaraja as *Abhilitanvayavada* (अभिहितान्वयवाद) and *Amvitabhidhanavada* (अन्विताविधानवाद) has critically examined them and had proved them to be insufficient in explaining sentential meaning as it figures in the mind through language⁸ Whereas Bhatt Mimansa held *Abhilitanvayavada* (अभिहितान्वयवाद) Prabhakara Mimansa held *Amvitabhidhanavada* (अन्विताविधानवाद). In the former there is expression and then association of words whereas in the latter there is association of words and then there is expression. That is former believes that first the individual words meaning are understood then they are conjoined to get the sentence meaning. On the other hand Prabhakara held that the whole sentence is cognized first and then individual words are provided that meaning in the context of the sentence.

Thus for Bhatt the meaning of the sentence can not be more than the meaning of individual words whereas for Prabhakara sentence meaning can be something more than the individual words.

The controversy between abhihitavayavada and anvitabhidhanavada is not significant for Bhartrhari, as he is not a constructionist (पदार्थवाद) but a sentential holist. Meaning, for him, is more than a semantic Unit in its popular use. He is well aware of at least five kinds of constructionist theories of sentential meaning. This theory is different from other sententialist who interprets sentential- meaning as a meaning different from the meaning of a sentence. Meaning, for him, is a cognitive- being, and thus his concern is not only with the controversy among the constructionists or padavadins (including abhihitavagavadins and anvitabhidhanavadins), but between them and the sentential- holists. This concern are those who accept a semantic unit different from a syntactic unit and those who take a semantic unit as a synthetic unit as a synthetic unity, and those who take it as a cognitive being non-differently revealed by language ubiquitously given in the mind⁹.

Another problem related to this matter is regarding convention. Whether convention is observed with words or with the sentence, is a central problem of Indian philosophy of language, the solution of which gives rise to various theories of language in general and in Indian semantics. The differences of abhihitavayavadins, anvitabhidhanavadins and akhandavakyarthavadins are essentially rooted in their different views regarding convention. For abhihitavayavadins, what a child observes as a unit of meaning in the use by elder is a word, and, hence, they accept words as independent units. On the basis of word as the primary unit, they explain sentence and sentential- meaning as outcomes

of an association of the words and word- meanings respectively. Anvitavidhanvadins, though they also assume word as the primary meaning-conveying unit, accept convention with sentential-meaning. They do not believe in the existence of the sentence independently of the word as a meaning-conveying unit. Sentential- meaning for them is not the meaning of a sentence, but of words conveying mutually related word-meaning. There is no need to accept sentence for explaining sentential- meaning.¹⁰ For Vaiyakaranas, communication is accomplished neither by one –to-one putting together of word meanings, nor by mutually related word-meaning, but by indivisible sentential-meaning. The expresser of the sentential- meaning is neither association of words nor the words having mutually related meaning but the indivisible sentence. On the basis of communication in day- to- day practices, Bhartrhari elucidates that convention is with the indivisible sentences, which is the indivisible expresser of the indivisible unit of communication, i.e. sentential- meaning¹¹. Bhartrhari rejects abhihitanaavayvadin and anvitavidhanvadins sentential meaning. For him a sentence is an inner, indivisible and a real unit of awareness in nature, i.e. sphota and sentential meaning is that which it reveals non- differently a flash awareness in the mind, for which Bhartrhari used the word ‘Pratibha’, is sentential meaning. Thus sphota for Bhartrhari is real language shabda) and the meaning is a clear and a distinct flash of awareness which is pratibha, which is also indivisible. Pratibha as the general meaning of all sentences of or even words (if complete meaning is revealed by them), is cognition or awareness and non different from sphota. For Bhartrhari sentential meaning is not as an object that figures in the mind. It is an idea or a clear and distinct flash of awareness. So

there is not any kind of one to one relationship between the sentence and their meaning. Each flash of awareness is unique in its nature and also may varied from person to person of different mental level or according to their pratibha. Pratibha as the general meaning of all sentences or even words (if complete meaning is revealed by them), is cognition or awareness and non-different from sphota. It is only from the sense of duality that from the point of view of language (expresser) it is called an expresser (sphota) and from the point of view of meaning, it is called expressed (pratibha) but in both of the cases it is a being figured in the mind by the language that reveals it.¹¹ Thus the meaning is integral and indivisible according to Bhartrhari and it is his Sentence- Holism.

If we compare the ‘*Prathibha theory*’s sentential-meaning with *Abhihitavayavada* (अभिहितान्वयवाद) and *Amvitabhidhanavada* (अन्विताविधानवाद) which have been above described, It seems that Phabhakara’s view is closer to that of Bhartrhari But actually it is not, because of among other reasons Prabhakara talks about the context of words in the sentence whereas Bhartrhari pointed at the context of the sentence.

Now we come to point out the differences between mimansaka’s and Bhartrhari’s theory of meaning. Where mimansaka are constructionist (padvadin), according to which the world and the phone have their own existence in the sentence and even though they are not in a sentence. They held that phone (the single sound) is real shabd. According to mimmanska word is a meaningful unit of language. They also say that meaning of sentence is decided with the association of word meaning. On the other hand Bhartrhari holds that sentence is the basic unit of language and meaningful expression. The meaning of word in

sentence has only pragmatic value as for him sphota is a real word and ‘Pratibha’ is real meaning.

Thus, we see that sphota theory, which is also a holistic theory of sentence, is a special kind of linguistic philosophy that called shabdadwaitwad philosophy where word (sphota) and meaning (sphota or pratibha) is non different.

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