

# IMPORTANCE OF ŚABDA ; A STUDY IN THE LIGHT OF BHARTRHARI'S PHILOSOPHY

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**Abstract:** Sarvam Śabdena bhāsate<sup>1</sup> – From these words of Bhartrhari, the author of Vākyapadīya, it is sure that all knowledge is illuminated through the word itself. The Śruti extols Vāk as the primary cause, out of which the entire universe has evolved. In Ṛg Veda, a complete sūkta glorifies Vāk. Therein, Vāk has been mentioned as Kāmadhenu, and it also says that Brahman is the base of the Vāktattva and that is the ultimate truth<sup>2</sup>. In Yajurveda, we find Vāk considered as the supreme wifely śakti of Prajāpati named as Vācaspati. In Atharva Veda also we can see that the ultimate principle of all language or speech is the Supreme Being Vāk and it is by virtue of speech that all Gods, men and animals live in the universe<sup>3</sup>. In Atharva Veda, the Vāk has been mentioned as Prajāpati and the creator of Daivī and Āsuri creation. Vāk is described as the support of Gods such as Mitrā-Varuṇa, Indra, Agni and the Aśvins. In the ṚgVeda, several hymns are devoted to Vāk (speech) and the same spiritual trends are continued in the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads.

**INDEX TERMS-** Śabda-Brahman, Śabdabodha, Bhartrhari, Vāk, Vākyaṛtha, Śruti

## INTRODUCTION

In the Śatapata Brāhmaṇa, Vāk is identified with Saraswati, who later becomes known as the Goddess of learning, wisdom and inspiration. It also says that the Ultimate Reality even beyond the Lord of creation is Vāk (speech)<sup>4</sup>. According to the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, Vāk as the cause of Artha tattva<sup>5</sup> and also says that it is the foundation of the philosophy of word and meaning. In the opinion of Upaniṣads, the Vāk functions as parabrahman<sup>6</sup>. In Chāndogyopaniṣad, Sanatkumara describes Vāk as the base of all thinking and he inspired Nārada to worship Vāk<sup>7</sup>. According to the Taittirīya Upaniṣad, it is the self from which the entire creation emanates from the self emerges ākāśa, from ākāśa vāyu, from vāyu, agni, and so on<sup>8</sup>.

## IMPORTANCE OF ŚABDA

The importance of śabda is so clear and it has been identified with Brahman by Bhartrhari. The word essence (Śabda-tattva) has been described by Bhartrhari as Śabda-Brahman. In his opinion, Vāk represents all different branches of science and arts<sup>9</sup>. Thus Bhartrhari supports Vivartavāda, according to which, the whole universe is evolved in Śabda-Brahman<sup>10</sup>. Bhartrhari says that as the sun brings to light the worldly objects, the same way, the Vāk Brahman, illumines the whole universe<sup>11</sup>. Western scholars give a divine position to śabda or word. This brings out its universality and this śabda itself is the fundamental basis of all life and thought-its divinity. In the opinion of Grammarians, the Śabda-Brahman (word-God) is described as the consciousness in all living things. It manifests itself in the form of vibrations in two ways (1) Nāma (Name) and (2) Rūpa (form). These two, i.e. śabda and artha constitute the contents of the mind and the objective world. The entire phenomenal world (nāma-rūpātma jagat) is evolved from the same conscious energy (cit śakti) which manifests itself in vāk or speech. Also they propounded this Brahman as Nitya, Niranjana, Ajara, Amara, and Akṣara.

According to Āgama śāstra, whatever is heard in the form of sound (śabda or nāda) is the manifestation of cosmic energy. So long as sound is produced, there is ākāśa: when elements are dissolved, the formless remains. That formless (nirākāra) and soundless (niḥśabda) quid is called by the name 'Para Brahman or Paramātmā'<sup>12</sup>.

In Bhāgavata Purāṇa, the Word-God is described as infinite and boundless like an ocean and extremely difficult to comprehend<sup>13</sup>.

The Mahābhārata says that one who is well-versed in word can attain the status of the supreme<sup>14</sup>. According to Tāntrika Philosophy, the cosmic seed (vindu) originates from creative sound (nāda)<sup>15</sup>, Supreme Consciousness (Parā Śakti), that is manifested through speech is all pervading and partless<sup>16</sup>.

Vaiyākaraṇas call this Śabda – Brahman as nitya and niravayava i.e eternal and indivisible which is the ultimate cause of the world by the name of sphoṭa<sup>17</sup>. In their opinion, the sustenance and the end of all manifestation. We know the truth about things through words and we know the truth about words through grammar. Therefore grammar leads one to the realization of Brahman in the form of the supreme word. And He who has a firm footing in Vyākaraṇa and is capable of studying the Veda,

realizes Brahman. This supreme word forms the essence of this Brahman; and it is devoid of all distinctions and such distinct entities have their distinct forms as apparent parts of that word principle<sup>18</sup>.

According to Patanjali, in a Nitya- Śabda, the varṇa should be kūṣṭha, Nirūpa, Niranjana and Acala and thus there is no scope for any Vikāra in the varṇa. From this, it is sure that Patanjali is clearly the sphaṭavādin. Defining sphaṭa, Patanjali says that which is heard by śrotra, known through intellect, expressed through pronouncing and has its place in Ākāśa is Śabda-Sphaṭa<sup>19</sup>.

In Advaita Vedanta also, the word is described as the Vivarta of Brahman. In the philosophy of Grammar, the concept of pratibha has been specifically mentioned, and this pratibha has been mentioned as vākyārtha according to Nāgeśa. In the opinion of Śabdabrahmavādins, śabda is the cause of the pratibha. They also propounded that there are two standards of jñāna, the samyak jñāna and the Samyak prayoga. Grammar is the Śāstra of Samyak –jñāna and Sahitya is the śāstra of Samyak-prayoga. For the fruitfulness of the śabda, both are very necessary. Therefore Patanjali says in the Mahābhāṣya – Ekah śabdah Samyak jñātah suprayuktah svarge loke kāmādhuk bhavati.

So we can conclude that the fire of the wooden piece becomes the cause of outer fire, like-wise śabda becomes the cause of different śrutis viz.

Araṇiṣṭham yatha jyotiḥ prakāśāntara kāraṇam

Tadvacchabdopi buddhiṣṭah srutīnām kāraṇam pṛdhak<sup>20</sup>.

## ŚABDA–DIFFERENT CONCEPTS

In our world, different people has been used the word ‘śabda’ in different senses in different contexts to mean ‘something’. Here the word ‘something’ may be an object, an emotion, an event, a command or a question. But all the systems of thought agree in this basic point that śravaṇendriya is the sense –organ responsible for perceiving ‘śabda’<sup>21</sup>. On the basis of this, we can say that

- In a wide sense or very broadly understood śabda means sound or dhvani of any kind which is perceived by the auditory sense-organ<sup>22</sup>.
- In a restricted sense, śabda means uttered or written strings of words having a syntax and meaning. In short it means language. Here śabda is used to denote a spoken word or pada which signifies something like the word ‘gauḥ’ which signifies an animal having a dewlap, a tail, hoofs, horns<sup>23</sup> etc.
- In a still more restricted sense, śabda is used in the sense of sentence spoken by a reliable person or āptavākya which is taken as authority or testimony<sup>24</sup>. This śabda has been recognized to be the means of verbal cognition (Śābdabodha).

According to Patanjali, ‘śabda’ basically means sound or dhvani<sup>25</sup>. In the opinion of Linguists, the word ‘śabda’ is used to signify a pada or word. This pada consists of certain letter or varṇas<sup>26</sup>.

The word śabda is translated as speech by some<sup>27</sup> while some others translated as word<sup>28</sup>. Sometimes the word authority is also used as a synonym for śabda<sup>29</sup>.

Mīmāṃsakas describes this śabda as an eternal substance (nitya dravya) while in contrast, the Naiyāyikas describe it as an attribute of ākāśa and understand it as anitya (impermanent)<sup>30</sup>. According to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, śabda, the sound is the specific or differentiating quality (Vaiśeṣika Guṇa) of Ākāśa.

Śabda can be explained etymologically in Sanskrit as the sequence of letters or phonemes from which meaning is sounded or busted forth<sup>31</sup>. For e.g. – ‘cow’- Here the sequence of letters or phonemes such as cow, from which the meaning, an individual such as cow, a form such as dew lap, tail, horn etc. and the generic property such as the cowness is sounded or busted forth. So we can say that cow is a word.

In modern linguistics, word (śabda or pada) is understood generally to be any segment of sentence bounded by successive points at which pausing (potential or actual) is possible<sup>32</sup>. Such a word is recognized as a part of speech conveying an idea or meaning partly or fully.

The word ‘śabda’ again is technically used in the school of Nyāya in the sense of a pramāṇavākya. A sentence is undoubtedly a specific collection of words. So, a sentence is inevitably a special collection of sounds.i.e mutually related articulate sounds. This śabda in its basic character of dhvani is a guṇa (quality) and not a dravya (substance).

In the opinion of Gautama – āptopadeśah śabdah i.e as a statement of a trustworthy person<sup>33</sup>. According to Annambhatta, ‘Āptavakyam śabdah’; testimony is a statement of a trustworthy person<sup>34</sup>. Here āpta is sometimes described as an authoritative person or a person having expert knowledge in a given field.

But for Bhartṛhari, ‘śabda’ means something more than language. It is the name of a complex phenomenon implying an activity as well as a principle. As a type of activity, it is something in which all human beings, in fact, all sentient beings are engaged. The Sanskrit term for its ‘śabda vyāpāra’. B.K.Matilal translates it as language<sup>35</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

In short, as a principle, śabda stands for the very potency for communicating thoughts through language. It is the linguistic potency, the very power of conceptualization, which is the basis of our consciousness as well as the awareness of the external world. This potency itself is śabdatattva, the word principle. This śabdatattva, being the central concept of all forms of phenomenal activity is identified with the Brahman. Because Bhartṛhari conceives the world principle as the basic principle of consciousness as well as the awareness of the existence of objects which are characterized by names and forms. He further conceives this reality to be without beginning and end (anādi nidhanam) means all our cognitive episodes about our inner states of mind as well as the external world are sequential in nature (krama). Also Bhartṛhari defines the objects as 'śabdopagrāhi'. It implies that objects of our thought are word determined. Be it perception, inference or any other method, whenever we cognize objects or external reality, we always do so in terms of names. Without names they are unidentifiable, hence not knowable. So we can say that without language or śabda, these objects cannot be understood.

## END NOTES.

1. Na so'sti pratyayo loke.....Śabdena bhāsate-Vākyapadīya 1.23
2. Ṛgveda-1.16.34, 35
3. Vācam devaḥ upaīvanti viśve, vācam gandharvāḥ paśavaḥ manuṣyāḥ-Adharvaveda 10.8.33
4. Yadvā prajāpateḥ paramasti vāgeva tat -Sāmkyapracāsanabhāṣya.
5. Vāk yoniḥ -Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 2.38
- 6.-Brhadāraṇyakopaniṣad-4.1.
7. Vāg vā nāmno bhūyasi vāg vā ṛgveda vijñāpayati-Chāndogyopaniṣad.7.2.1
8. Etasmāt ātmanaḥ ākāśaḥ sambhūtaḥ ākāśāt vāyuḥ vāyoragniḥ-Taittirīyopaniṣad.2.1
9. Vākyapadīya 1.126.28
10. śabdasya pariṇamoyam-vyāvartata. Vākyapadīya I.120
11. The Veda and Vedanta; p.no 97
12. Yat kincinnādarupeṇa...gīyate-Haṭayogapradeepika.IV.101.2
13. Śabdabrahma...Samudravat-Bhāṣaparicheda-1.2
14. Mahābhārata-Śāntiparva-270.
15. Sarvadarśana Samgrah.
16. The concept of language.p.No.3
17. The Veda and Vedanta-P.No.95.
18. Vākyapadīya-P.No.103.46.
19. Śrotamatrendriya grāhyah śabdah-Mānameyodaya p.218.
20. Śrotagrāhyordhah śabdah-Vākyavrtti.
21. Mahābhāṣya- 1.
22. Āptopadeśah śabdah-Nyāyabhāṣya.
23. Kastarhi śabdah...tasmāt dvaniḥ śabdah-Mahābhāṣya I Ahnika.
24. Varnātmakānām śabdānām samāhāram padam-Mānameyodaya-P.226., padam ca varṇasamooḥaḥ-Tarkabhāṣa.P.14., yadādarśānām vikṛta varṇa vibhaktyantāḥ padasajna bhavanti-Nyāyasūtra 22.6
25. Vidyābhooṣana 1971:444, Keith 1977:158,165.
26. Athalye 1974:329, C Bhattacharya 1975:17,197.
27. Datta 1972:336, Potter 1977:176,406.
28. śabdah...Upekshitam-Mānameyodaya P.218.
29. Śabdyate anena ardhaḥ iti śabdah-Mahābhāṣya 1.1.3.
30. Hockett 1958
31. Nyāyasūtra 1.1.7.
32. Tarkasamgrah-P.59
33. The word and the world.P.85.

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