

An Analysis of Shabda Brahma Theory According to Bhartruhari

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ABSTRACT

It is well known that *Vyakarana Shastra* (Sanskrit Grammar) is not only the science of language but also it has delivered the philosophical aspect to the mankind. The philosophical thinking started from *Vyadi* and it has bloomed by a great philosopher called *Bhartruhari*. According to *Bhartruhari* Shabda itself the *BRAHMA*. He has demonstrated the theory with many arguments and authentically. Here in this research paper I have tried to reveal the factors of *Shabda Brahma* theory with the comparison of *Vedantic Monism*.

KEYWORDS: *Shabda Brahma, Natya Shastra, Nyaya Manjari, Shabdadwetavada, Chaitanya, Apavarga, Vyakaranagama*

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INTRODUCTION

The query might reasonably arise: If the Shabda tattva conceived as Brahman in the grammatik-metaphysical system of Bhartruhari be so closely akin to the Upanishadic conception of Brahman as being, consciousness and bliss, what can be the reason of posing a new metaphysical doctrine which ultimately reduces itself to Vedantic Monism? How is shabda Brahman to be differentiated from Brahman of the Upanishads? This, indeed, is a very cogent query and it must have to be faced and answered satisfactorily before the doctrine of Shabda Brahman can be regarded as a novel and valid contribution in the field of philosophical inquiry. Bhartruhari's arguments in favor of considering shabda as the ubiquitous and eternal principle underlying all our activities within the limits of the phenomenal universe and as the sole ground of its diversities and differentiations are mainly that all our cognitions of objects are imbued with the corresponding verbal counterparts and that the identity of shabda with artha on the one hand and the corresponding cognition on the other is firmly established by such usages as *gaur iti jnanam, gaur iti shabdah* and *gaur iti arthah*, where we identify the verbal concept with *jnana*,

shabda and *artha*. Even the cognitions of a child, an uneducated rustic and birds and beasts are shot through with *shabda*, though not as distinct as in the case of grown up men acquainted with the use of language as the medium of communication. In Bhartruhari's view in the case of new born baby or an animal of lower species *shabda- bhavana*, (VP I.122) the subtle impressions of shabda are stored in the inner psychosis as seeds which make all activities possible. As he says;

*Iti kartavyata loke sarva shabda vyapasraya |
Yam purvahita samskaro balo pi pratipadyate ||
(VP.I.121)*

Abhinavagupta, in his gloss on Bharata's *Natya Sastra* XX.26: *ya vak pradhana sa Bharati*, observes;

Na hy eko pi kaschit cestamso sti | kaya –cesta api hi manasibhih suksamabhis ca vacikibhis cestabhir vyapyanta eva | “na so sti pratyayo loke yah shabdanugamad rte” iti nyayat

(Vakyapadiya of Bhartruhari | Ed.
Prof.K.V.Abhyankar and Acharya V.P.
Limiyee, Appen. III P.209)

Shabda as conceived in Bhartruhari's system is the very consciousness (*samjna/pratibha*) itself:

Saisa samsarinam samjna bahir antas ca vartate

If this universal and all pervasive potency (*sakti*) residing in *vak* disappears, there would no illumination (*prakasa*) anywhere and life would be reduced to an inorganic mass devoid of the least tinge of consciousness on it. In the words of Bhartruhari:

*Arthakriyasu vak sarvan samihayati dehinah |
Tadutkrantau visamjnyam drusyate kashtra
kudyavat || (VP.I.127)*

But these lofty claims Bhartruhari regarding the role of speech (*Vak*) in the universe have been vehemently refuted by Jayanta Bhatta in his *Nyaya Manjari*, as also by Kumarila in his *Sloka vartika*. Kumarila disowns Bhartruhari's claim that the identity of *shabda* with *artha* and *jnana* is clearly comprehended by us. In order to bring out the intrinsic difference underlying the nature of three elements Kumarila asserts;

*Gavi sasnadimad rupa gavi rupa'bhidhayake |
Nirakarobhyajane samvittih paramarthatah ||
(Sloka vartika 185 on pratyaksa sutra)*

Shabda according to the Mimamsa is just a means like the lamp or the organ of sight towards comprehension of an object as qualified by a particular property and the means (*upaya*) cannot be identified with the end (*upeya*). As Kumarila declares:

*Na copeyebhyupayaysya rupadhyasa prasajyate |
Na hi dipendriyadinam rupadhyaropa isyate ||*

So, in his opinion, the comprehension of identity between *Shabda*, *artha* and *jnana*, which forms the bed-rock of Bhartruhari's metaphysics, is nothing but a chimera.

The Naiyayikas are too or less severe in their attack against Bhartruhari's metaphysical concept of *Vak*. The conception of three levels of *Vak*-viz *Vaikhari*, *Madhyama* and *Pashyanti* is according to Jayanta Bhatta, nothing but a fiction. *Madhyama* is nothing but inner consciousness comprising both *Vachya* (meaning) and *Vachaka* (verbal element) as its objects without shedding in the least its intrinsic nature *qua* consciousness as distinct from its objects. *Pashyanti*, on the other hand, is but another name of indeterminate cognition (*nirvikalpaka jnana*), and though it is illuminatory in character, it is unwarranted to conceive it as identical with *vak*, as Bhartruhari and his followers do. Cognition alienated from the element of *vak* is as much possible and valid

as when associated with *vak* and it is not at all rational to think of cognition dissociated from *vak* as inert and bereft of the potency of illumination as the *shabdadvaitavadins* erroneously think. Thus, the thesis relating to the determinate character of all cognitions invariably associated as they are with the corresponding verbal element, as the *shabdadvaitavadins* endeavour to establish, has no sound basis to stand upon. Jayanta Bhatta has thus summed up the position of the Nyaya- Vaisesika pluralists in the following verses;

*Antah-samkalpo varnyate madhyama vak
Seyam buddyatma naisa vacah prabhedah |
Buddhir vachyam vacakam collikhanti
Rupam natmiyam bodha bhavam jahati ||
Pashyanti tu nirvikalpamater namantranam
kalpitam*

*Vijjanasya hi na prakasavapuso vagrupata
shasawati |*

*Jatesmin visayavabhasini tatah syad vavamarso
giro*

*Na syad vapi na jatu vag virahite bodho jadatvam
spruset ||*

(Nyaya Manjari, Vol.I.P.355, Kashi Sanskrit Series. Edn)

In short *Vaikhari* is the only form of speech that is conceivable and Bhartruhari's metaphysical super-structure falls to the ground with the demolition of the three levels of speech, which form its corner-stone. As Jayanta Bhatta notes;

*Yat punar avadi vacas traividhyam tadapi
nanumanyate |
Ekaiva vaikhari vag vag iti prasaidha hi || (Ibid,
Vol.I.p.355)*

In connection with his refutation of *shabda vivarta vada* Jayanta observes that if *shabda Brahman* be endowed with its innate properties of consciousness, being, bliss and ubiquity in consonance with the Upanisadic utterance – viz “*vijnanam anandam brahma*” it becomes nothing but a novel nomenclature for supreme Godhead (*Isvara*) as conceived by the Naiyayikas, As Jayanta states:

*Atah vijnanam anandam brahma ityagama vacanam
anusarta vibhutvam iva cetanatwam api shabda
brahmano varnyate tarhisvarasyaiva shabda
brahmeti nama krutam syat ||*

Besides, the existence of two brahmanas- viz. one *shabda-brahman* and the other *para-brahman*, as pointed out in the oft-quoted verse;

*Dve brahmani veditavye shabda-brahma param ca
syat |*

*Shabda brahmani nishnatah param
brahmadhigacchati ||
(Tripur-tapinyupanishad, 5, 17)*

-has been sarcastically derided by Jayanta with the remark that it is, indeed, an abnormal phenomenon, which can be called *brahma-subhiksa*, where *Brahman* can be accessible according to our sweet will irrespective of numbers, and if one of these two *Brahmans* be fictitious, it is indeed not proper to designate it as *Brahman*, where as if both of them be equally real the Monism of the Grammarians becomes untenable. So, Jayanta concludes his critique of *Shabdadvaitavada* with the following cryptic joke;

Yadapyuchyate “dve brahmani veditavye....”iti tadapi brahma-subhiksam atyantam alaukikam ekatarasya brahmanah kalpanikatvat | akalpanikatve va katham advaita vadah? Tasmad krutam etena shabda brahmanah | svasti parasmai brahmane bhuyat ...|| (Nyaya Manjari Vol.II.p.103)

The Vedantists of Shanakara's schools are equally stringent in their attack on shabdadvaita-vada of the Grammarians. In Vimuktatman's *Ista-siddhi* this monistic doctrine has been refuted point by point in the first chapter, *karikas* 73-76 and the gloss thereon. The main grounds of his attack are as follow:

1. The same *shabda* cannot be both *vacya* and *vaktru*. As he notes:

*Aha shabdah svayam vacya iti shabdo na tat tatha |
Aikye hi vaktruta va syad vacyata van a tubhayam ||*

2. The doctrine that both *vacya* and *vacaka* are but *vivarta-s* of *Shabda Brahman* and have, therefore been identified with *Brahman* goes against the express declaration of the Upanishads that *Brahman* is a *shabda*, other *shabda* in such statements as: *ashabdam asprusam arupam avyayam.....* Besides, if *shabda* be conceived as *buddhi-grahya* in its subtle form, it cannot be regarded as *svayam prakasa*. On the other hand, if it is regarded as *svayam-prakasa*, it reduces itself to nothing but Upanishadic self, which by no means can be identified with *shabda*. As Vimuktatman observes in his comments on *Ista-siddhi*, I.75;

*Na ca shabdo brahmeti srutir asti | yadi namasti
tathapi sa anya para | na tu shabdasya
brahmatvam brahmano va shabdatvam vadet |...
“ yad vaca nabhyuditam yena vag abhyudyate,
yac chrotrena na shrunoti, ashabdam
asprusham..ityader na shabdo brahma napi
shabdavad iti shrutam | atah shabdo*

*brahmetyayuktam | ...ato na shabdadvaita-
siddhih |*

3. What more, if *shabda* is regarded as *Brahman*, *Brahman* is apparently reduced to something that is external (*Parak*) and not the innermost principle (*pratyak*) like our conscious self (*atman*). So it is more logical to subscribe to the monistic view of *atmadvaita* and repudiate the doctrine of *shabdadvaita* as propounded by the Grammarians, which is as much valid as *ghatadvaita*, as has been scathingly put forth by Vimuktatman:

*Shabdo brahmetyukte parageva Brahman uktam ajno
manyate na tu pratyak | atmashabdenanuktatvac ca |
atoham brahmeti dhir na bhavet, anatma brahmeti va
dhir bhavet | tada “aham brahmasmi” ityadi
shrutivirodhah | tasmad atmadvaitam eva siddhyati
na shabdadvaitam ghatadvaitam veti siddham ||
(Ishta-siddhi, P.176)*

Thus Bhartruhari's doctrine, which is based upon *agama* or unbroken tradition, as he himself claims, is unique in the history of metaphysical speculations of India. It is not merely based on *tarka* or discursive reasoning, but has its fir, roots in the mystic spiritual experiences of the great seers of old, which in their turn are based upon *agama*. As Bhartuhari boldly declares:

*Na cagamad rute dharmastarkena vyavatishtate |
Rushinam api yaj jnanam tadapi agamapurvakam ||
(V P.I.30)*

Bhartruhari likens *agama* to *chaitanya* or consciousness, which is ever-existent in an unbroken continuity. As he states:

*Caitanyam iva yascayam avichhedena vartate |
Agamas tam upasino hetuvadair na badhyate ||
(VP.I.41)*

So, the wisdom that is stored in the *agama-s* are reinforced by the direct perceptual realizations of the distinguished seers affiliated to the respective *agama-s* cannot be invalidated by *tarka* or *hetuvada* or argumentative reasonings running counter to those *agama-s*. And of all the *agama* Bhartruhari regards *trayi* alone as the seed which persists for ever even when all the rival *agamas* disappear without leaving any trace behind. As he says:

*Na jatv akartrkam kascid agamam pratipadyate |
Bijam sarvagamayay trayyevato vyavasthita ||
(VP.I 133)*

Thus, Bhartruhari's doctrine has its basis in *agama*, has been re-in forced by the direct personal experiences of seers in their state of spiritual trance,

and lastly, has been established as valid by reasoning (*tarka*) as well, which does not run counter to the wisdom embodied in the *agama-s*, since *tarka* which does not go against the *Vedas* and *Shastra-*, that constitute the *agama*, is like eyes illuminating the true essence of things to those who are devoid of their own power of discrimination. In the words of Bhartruhari: *Veda-shastravirodhi ca tarkascakshur apasyatam*. Bhartruhari in the concluding verses of the second *Kanda* of his *magnum opus* sings in praise of the ancient *agama-s* (*purana-agama*) and calls his treatise as *Agama-samuccaya*, a systematizations of the traditional teachings relating to *vyakaranagama* undertaken under the inspiration of his preceptor. (VP.II.482-487)

According to Bhartruhari and the metaphysical school to which he is affiliated *vyakaranagama* is not merely concerned with an analytical study of the correct form of speech as spoken by the learned (*shishta*), it is also the gateway to the ultimate goal of human existence, the *sumum bonum* of our life-viz. salvation (*apavarga*). As he declares in one of the memorable verses of *Brahma kanda*

*Tad dwaram apavargasya vang malanam
cikitsitam |
Pavitram sarva vidyanam adhividyam prakasate ||*
(VP. I.14)

“It (Grammar) is the door of salvation, the remedy for all the impurities of speech, the purifier of all the sciences and shines in every branch of knowledge”

*Idam adya padasthanam siddhi sopana parvanam |
Iyam sa mokshamananam ajihma raja paddhati ||*
(VP.I.16)

“This is the first step in the ladder leading to liberation, this the straight royal road for all those who desire salvation”

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