

SABDALOKA
THE LIGHT OF THE WORDS

SUNIL SONDHI

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The monograph is a mid-term report for the ICSSR-IMPRESS project on 'Culture and Communication in India: Contemporary Relevance of Indian Classical Texts'. It contains research articles published in *Kalākalpa: IGNC Journal of Arts* during 2020-21.

Project

Culture and Communication in India: Contemporary Relevance of Indian Classical Texts

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Our collective debt to the authors of the Indian classical texts is immeasurable. Just one *Asya Vāmiya Sūkta* of *Rgveda* (1,164) inspired Prof. Vasudev Sharan Agrawal to write his classic book *The Thousand Syllabled Speech*, in which he observed that the dictionary meanings are quite all right as found in the works of modern scholars of the East and West, and also in the writings of ancient commentators. But the understanding of the ideas of the Vedic thinkers has to go beyond words to do full justice to those authors endowed with the power of thought. Each author in the *Vedas* spoke an idiom of which the meaning was understandable to those who were prepared to experience the vision of the Absolute Reality. There are thousands of such hymns in the *Vedas*, and thousands of classical texts in the Indian intellectual tradition. Any study of such texts must commence with the head bowed in deep gratitude.

Vāk Sūktam

अहं रुद्रेभिर्वसुभिश्चराम्यहमादित्यैरुत विश्वदेवैः।
अहं मित्रावरुणोभा बिभर्म्यहमिन्द्राग्नी अहमश्विनोभा॥१॥

(I TRAVEL with the Rudras and the Vasus, with the Ādityas and All-Gods I wander.
I hold aloft both Varuṇa and Mitra, Indra and Agni, and the Pair of Aśvins.)

अहं सोममाहनसं बिभर्म्यहं त्वष्टारमुत पूषणं भगम्।
अहं दधामि द्रविणं हविष्मते सुप्राव्येꣳ यजमानाय सुन्वते॥२॥

(I cherish and sustain high-swelling Soma, and Tvaṣṭar I support, Pūṣan, and Bhaga.
I load with wealth the zealous sacrificer who pours the juice and offers his oblation.)

अहं राष्ट्री संगमनी वसूनां चिकितुषी प्रथमा यज्ञियानाम्।
तां मा देवा व्यदधुः पुरुत्रा भूरिस्थात्रां भूर्यावेशयन्तीम्॥३॥

(I am the Queen, the gatherer-up of treasures, most thoughtful, first of those who merit worship.
Thus Gods have established me in many places with many homes to enter and abide in.)

मया सो अन्नमन्ति यो विपश्यति यः प्राणिति य ईं शृणोत्युक्तम्।
अमन्तवो मां त उप क्षियन्ति श्रुधि श्रुत श्रद्धिवं ते वदामि॥४॥

(Through me alone all eat the food that feeds them,—each man who sees, brewhes, hears the word outspoken.
They know it not, but yet they dwell beside me. Hear, one and all, the truth as I declare it.)

अहमेव स्वयमिदं वदामि जुष्टं देवेभिरुत मानुषेभिः।
यं कामये तंतमुग्रं कृणोमि तं ब्रह्माणं तमृषिं सुमेधाम्॥५॥

(I, verily, myself announce and utter the word that Gods and men alike shall welcome.
I make the man I love exceeding mighty, make him a sage, a Ṛṣi, and a Brahman.)

अहं रुद्राय धनुरा तनोमि ब्रह्मद्विषे शरवे हन्तवा उ।
अहं जनाय समदं कृणोम्यहं द्यावापृथिवी आ विवेश॥६॥

(I bend the bow for Rudra that his arrow may strike and slay the hater of devotion.
I rouse and order battle for the people, and I have penetrated Earth and Heaven.)

अहं सुवे पितरमस्य मूर्धन्मम योनिरप्स्वः सप्तः समुद्रे।
ततो वि तिष्ठे भुवनानु विश्वोतामूं द्यां वर्ष्मणोप स्पृशामि॥७॥

(On the world's summit I bring forth the Father: my home is in the waters, in the ocean.
Thence I extend o'er all existing creatures, and touch even yonder heaven with my forehead.)

अहमेव वातइव प्र वाम्यारभमाणा भुवनानि विश्वा।
परो दिवा पर एना पृथिव्यैतावती महिना सं बभूव॥८॥

(I breathe a strong breath like the wind and tempest, the while I hold together all existence.
Beyond this wide earth and beyond the heavens I have become so mighty in my grandeur.)

[126] [8 वागाम्भृणी। आत्मा। त्रिष्टुप्, 2 जगती]
ऋग्वेदसंहिता [म.10, अनु. 10, सू. 125]

(English Translation: Griffith, R. T. H., 1897, *Hymns of the Rigveda, Vol. II*. Benares: E.J. Lazarus and Co.)



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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....

ŚABDA BRAHMA.....

Science and Spirit of Language in Indian Culture

ŚABDA ŚAKTI.....

Power of Words in India's Linguistic Tradition

ŚABDĀNUSĀNAM.....

The Integral View of Communication

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....

INTRODUCTION

This monograph is a compilation of my three articles published in *Kalākalpa: IGNC Journal of Arts* during 2020-21. The articles are based on research work for the ICSSR-IMPRESS project on 'Culture and Communication in India: Contemporary Relevance of Indian Classical Texts'. It is the premise of this project that problems in language and communication within and between different cultures and societies emerge from a complex web of linguistic, social, and cultural factors that go beyond any individual, or event. The hypothesis is that to resolve this problem we need to look within the individual and the society and examine the disconnect between language and culture. India's rich linguistic heritage is embedded in its composite and integrated culture. It is therefore imperative that problems in language proficiency and competence in India should be resolved on the basis of cultural foundations of Indian languages.

The nature of language and communication as an important concern and linguistics analysis as a cognitive method became established in Western philosophy only in the twentieth century. This celebrated 'linguistic turn' had happened in classical Indian philosophy at least two thousand years earlier. A strong tradition of linguistic analysis that developed in India in the first millennium BCE has continued uninterrupted to modern times. The fields of phonetics and grammar were recognized first. By the fifth century BCE Pāṇini composed a complete grammar of Sanskrit that generated utterances from basic elements under semantic and co-occurrence conditions. Paninian grammar utilized sophisticated techniques of reference, a formal meta-language, and abstract principles of rule precedence. The long tradition of grammatical commentary that followed Pāṇini's work investigated subtleties of verbal cognition in discussion with well-developed philosophical disciplines of logic and ritual exegesis. Linguistic analysis of Sanskrit inspired similar analysis of other Indian languages.

The study of language and communication in India was never a monopoly of the logicians or the rhetoricians, as it was in Greece. Almost all schools of thought in India

began their discussions from the fundamental problem of communication. The scholar-saints of the Vedic age were greatly concerned with the powers and limitations of language as a means of communicating their personal experiences of a visionary nature to their kinsmen, and they tried to exhibit the power of language by various means. They praised the power of language by identifying it with the powerful goddess Sarasvatī, ready to give desired results to her devotees. The entire creation was attributed by some sages to divine language, and it was generally accepted that ordinary speech of mortals was only a part of that language.

The Indian communication model to a large extent is shaped by the *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads*, the diverse philosophical schools and traditions, and a treasure of ideas and practices stemming from India's composite cultural heritage. This legacy contributes to a diverse and yet coherent Indian way of communication in a flowing movement. While the seeds of the study of speech and language in India may be traced in the *Rgveda*, and the study of the structure of language as authoritatively established in the Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, and Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, a full-fledged statement and discussion of science and spirit of language was given in Bhartr̥hari's *Vākyapadīya* in the fifth century. Only a few of such classical texts have been studied so far with regard to their contribution towards the evolution of an Indian communication model. Towards this end, the Indian classical texts relating to language need to be explored further, and relevant ideas stemming from them adopted for integrative and accommodative language and communication in India and the world.

The goal of Indian thought on language and communication is not mere rational knowledge but also experience of the Absolute Reality or *Brahma*. The knowledge of language resulting in correct speech not only communicates meaning but also enables one to experience the Absolute Reality. This is the meaning of the Indian term *darśana*, which literally means 'vision' and which corresponds to the highest level of language termed as *paśyantī*. It is this feature that sets the Indian linguistics apart from the modern western perspectives on language. From the early *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads*, the Indian approach to language and communication has never been limited to composition and transmission of information about the objective world. All aspects of human experience were regarded as open to expression through language. Linguistics in India always had and continues to have both phenomenal and metaphysical dimensions.

The Indian communication model is based on the structure of language as an ascending hierarchy of conceptual abstraction between the base level of physical reality, through intermediate levels of abstraction, to the highest levels of abstraction - *Śabda Brahma* - where linguistic form merges with formless Absolute Reality beyond language and thought. While the connection of the basic linguistic terms with sense perceptions of everyday experiences is of fundamental importance, comprehension of the connections between our sense perceptions in their totality require logically derived concepts at different levels of abstraction. The concept of *Śabda Śakti* symbolizes the creative

energy of language in the Indian tradition that connects and integrates the highest and lowest levels of abstraction seamlessly, gracefully, and holistically, not losing touch with reality at different levels.

Bhartr̥hari begins his *Vākyapadīya* with metaphysical enquiry and then goes on to empirical study of phenomenal language. In the first section of the work called *Brahmakāṇḍa*, are given the basic ideas concerning the concept of *Śabda Brahma*. In the second section called *Vākyakāṇḍa*, the fundamental idea of the integral nature of the sentence is discussed. The third section is the largest, in which grammatical topics mostly concerning words and their meaning are discussed. This section is called *Prakarankāṇḍa*. All the sections are interrelated and connected and form an integral whole.

Bhartr̥hari's enquiry into the relationship of word and meaning in the *Prakarankāṇḍa* includes a clear analysis of the limitations and inadequacies of ordinary or secondary words to communicate all dimensions and levels of the Absolute Reality. Secondary words express only segments of Absolute Reality which are autonomous and yet integrated with the Absolute reality which in its undivided wholeness and flowing movement can never be expressed by the words and concepts of human language. As the well-known *Rigvedic* hymn says, speech merely recognizes and gives meaning to manifold forms arising out of the waters of the infinite ocean of ultimate reality. *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* completes the message when it says:

yatovaconivartante, aprapyamanasasaha, anandambrahmanovidvan, nabibhetikadacana.

(From where the words return along with the mind, only the one who knows that undifferentiated Brahma attains supreme bliss.)

For Bhartr̥hari, the child and the scholar are in the same position as far as limitations and inadequacies of understanding and communication are concerned. Both understand and communicate only a part of the reality. The common words, therefore, are unable to express the absolute nature of reality. Words express the reality of any object or event in a manner that is only an interpretation and representation of the reality of the object or event. Words are based on cognitions which do not reveal the full reality and so present things in another form, not determined by their real form. Bhartr̥hari emphasizes that in ordinary cases of language use, the literal form may not convey the intended meaning. In such cases, a thorough understanding of the context is required to avoid confusions and misunderstanding in communication.

In practice, the words are used on the basis of bounded sense perception and rationality. Common people may not be able to reach the level of consciousness that may have been reached by scholars and sages. They understand things in a limited manner and engage in communication on that basis. The *Prakarankāṇḍa* was an attempt

to explain and organize words as used by the common people. The notions of action, substance, and quality and so on used by the science of grammar are all worldly and secondary notions. Ordinary words can express only those aspects of reality which appear in our cognition. They do not touch the undifferentiated and un-manifest reality, but move about in the world of differentiated and manifest reality. In a sense, we create some form of reality, for ourselves, by thinking and speaking about it. Speech is uncertain and ambiguous, like the Absolute Reality. Therefore, it is free and creative.

Just as different perceptions reveal an object in a different form, similarly, meaning is understood from words in various forms. A word-meaning intended in a certain way by a speaker takes different shapes in different hearers depending upon the comprehension of each. Although the same object is perceived, its perception varies from person to person, and even the same person perceives the same object in a different form on another occasion. The same person at different times and different persons at the same time understand the meaning of the same word in different forms due to the different ways of understanding. All human language is by nature, fluid, flexible, and dynamic. Meaning tends to be a problem of probability rather than perfect exactitude.

When a word can give different meanings, how does one decide the most appropriate word in a particular context? The Indian classical texts refer to a list of factors which can help in making a proper decision with regard to the meaning of a word. The list includes complementary aspects, unrelated aspects, relevance, contradiction, the meaning of another word, situation-context, evidence from another sentence, and the proximity of another word. From this, it is evident that the form of a word by itself is not sufficient to provide the most appropriate meaning in all contexts. Meaning lies in the intention behind the spoken word and the context in which it is communicated and heard.

The innovative aspect of the present research is exploration of complementarity between the Indian communication model and the modern science in what may be termed as a quantum turn in linguistics. In quantum mechanics, observation is what brings about objective and measurable reality. It is inherently a contextual process that involves first deciding what particular aspects to observe in nature and then preparing the perceptual means in such a way that observation can be made. If these steps are done differently, then different results will be obtained. Similarly, in language what brings about the transformation of ideas or impulses from potential meanings into an actual one is the speech act, which is intentional, an act of will. This speech act is contextual, as it is related to other words and particular listeners. Language emerges from the speaker's intention to try to communicate one meaning rather than the other out of the several meanings in the mind. While the intention to communicate determines the effect in a certain way, the meaning that is actually communicated depends also on the listener whose comprehension will depend on how what is said is

interpreted in the context of listeners' memory and experience. So the idea common to Indian communication and quantum mechanics is that intention and context relate to language in the same way as observation and measurement devices in physics relate to quantum reality.

The essential message of the Indian classical texts with regard to language and communication is that there are different levels of language between the two extremes termed as *paśyantī* and *vaikhari*, which correspond to different levels of consciousness of the Absolute Reality. The highest level of language emerges more from insight and intuition rather than sense perception, while the lowest stage of common or secondary language relates to the level of perceptible objects and events. The Absolute Reality of nature lies outside human perception of space and time, and therefore, is not expressible in ordinary language. The experience of that reality can only be indicated by words that try to go beyond words. However, the Absolute Reality creates objects and events that can be located in space and time of human sense-perception. All human language and communication relates primarily to the spectrum of relative realities of the objective world. Yet, it possesses unexplored powers that can create untried and unknown pathways of language which a creative and ingenious person can follow to illuminate hidden dimensions of reality by breaking open and extending the horizons of expressibility.

ŚABDA BRAHMA

SCIENCE AND SPIRIT OF LANGUAGE IN INDIAN CULTURE*

Sunil Sondhi

ABSTRACT

Study of language and communication has been an important concern in India's intellectual and cultural tradition. All streams of Indian philosophical thinking included in their considerations the basic problem of language and communication.

While the seeds of the study of language in India may be traced in the *Rgveda*, and the study of the structure of language as authoritatively established in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, a full-fledged statement, and discussion of science and spirit of language was given in *Bharṭṛhari's Vākyapadīya*. It was *Bharṭṛhari* who first systematically equated *Brahma* (Absolute Reality) with *Śabda* (language), going on to argue that all languages arise as a manifestation of the *Śabda Brahma*.

From the early investigations in the *Veda*, *Prātiśākhya* and *Śikṣā*, through the grammar of the language in *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and *Mahābhāṣya*, to the highest levels of consciousness of *Śabda Brahma* in *Vākyapadīya*, and *Spanda* in *Tantrāloka*, India's linguistic tradition bears the clear imprint of the recognition that while grammar is important for good language, the righteous language is good for coordination and integration in human communication. The connective potential of insightful language needs to be used to address the manifold problems of communication in interpersonal and intercultural relations. Enormous creativity is enfolded in the concept of *Śabda Brahma*. A deeper and wider understanding of the concept can help to establish a framework for further research and applied work in this direction.

Keywords: Indian culture, Vedic heritage, Cultural linguistics, Applied linguistics

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INTRODUCTION

The study of language and communication has been an important concern in India's intellectual and cultural tradition. It has received serious attention from sages and scholars from the earliest times. All the streams of Indian philosophical thinking included in their discussions the basic problem of language and communication. Indian approaches to the study of language and communication were characterized by both analysis and synthesis. On the one hand, systematic attempts were made to analyse language in terms of sentences, words, stems, morphemes, and phonemes. On the other, rules of coherence between these various elements were not only systematized but also integrated with the laws of nature (Coward & Kunjunniraja, 1990, p. 4). The studies were undertaken in terms of a general scientific methodology which was remarkably consistent, explicit, and open to critical review. From the beginning, linguistics in India has occupied the centre of its scientific tradition (Staal, 1974, p. 71).

Recent researches have further added convincing evidence to show that even as Indian scholars went deeper into the scientific analysis of language and communication, they kept their sights steady on the broad and important lines of synthesis and the order of nature (Singh, 1986, p. 452). Joseph Needham, a pioneer of the study of scientific development in the non-Western civilizations observed that one of the most striking experiences of his life was connected with the ethical values to be attached to science, and he considered ethics to be needed today more than ever. He believed that the Vedic concept of *ṛta*, the order of nature, its pattern and organization, and its self-originating character underlying all phenomena, could be of much value in furthering the understanding and application of science for the benefit of humanity (Chattopadhyaya, 1986, p. vii). Needham seemed to have echoed Einstein's belief that all the systematic thinking of human beings pales into insignificance when compared with the superiority of intelligence revealed in the harmony of nature (Einstein, 1952, p. 40).

The present article explores the development of the study of linguistics in India as a field of scientific and cultural inquiry. From the early investigations in the *Veda*, *Prātiśākhya* and *Śikṣā*, through the grammar of the language in *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and *Mahābhāṣya*, to the highest levels of consciousness of *Śabda Brahma* in *Vākyapadīya*, and *Para Vāk* in *Tantrāloka*, India's linguistic tradition bears the clear imprint of the recognition that while grammar is important for better language, the righteous language is valuable for coordination and integration in human communication. Very few countries can claim to have produced such a consistent and integrated tradition of holistic studies in language and culture. The insights of India's sages and scholars are now being understood and appreciated better in the light of scientific advances made since the twentieth century.

SCIENCE AND SPIRIT

The general trend of Western thinking in the nineteenth century had been toward an increasing faith in the scientific method and its mechanistic, logical worldview. It led to a general disbelief regarding those concepts and languages which did not fit into the closed frame of experimental science. In the mechanistic view, the progress of science was pictured as a crusade of conquest into the material world. The utility was the watchword of the time, and human attitude toward nature changed from a contemplative one to the utilitarian one.

This frame of enquiry was so narrow and superficial that it was not easy to find a place in it for the many concepts of human language that always belonged to its very substance, for instance, the concepts of mind, of the eternal spirit, or life. One of the extreme consequences of this rigid frame of thought was the open hostility of science toward religion and philosophy and its loss of touch with that part of reality which is beyond the objective and material world (Heisenberg, 1962, p. 137).

This mechanistic view of classical science was reflected in linguistics, where the dominant view was and continues to be, to consider language as being in the heads of individuals, whether as 'mental organ', 'computational devise', or even 'instinct' (Wendt, 2015, p. 210). In this mainstream view which for long considered as Compositionism, linguists saw the meaning of a whole sentence or paragraph as a function of the meaning of its constituent parts or forms and the way in which they were combined. The resulting image of language and communication is one of the mechanical processes, which is materialistic, well-defined, and deterministic. It sees communication as transmission and as a transaction in which meaning is built out of smaller semantic forms with intrinsic content. Steven Pinker and Noam Chomsky have argued that linguistic competence is not a cultural creation, and it can be defined in terms of the deep structures of rule-based universal grammar.

In the twentieth century, path-breaking scientific research showed that there was a reality beyond the apparent, objective, and mechanistic forms. The conventional or classical way is to see reality as a three-dimensional space in which objects change over time. Quantum reality is a four-dimensional space called *spacetime* that simply exists, unchanging, never created, and never destroyed (**Tegmark, p. 270**). *Spacetime* does not exist in space and time, rather space and time exist within it. Concepts of past, present, and future have no objective meaning in *spacetime*. Description of the *spacetime* tests the limits of our cognitive and linguistic competence because our words and concepts have been shaped by our bounded perceptions of the apparent reality (Einstein, 1952; Bohr, 1958; Heisenberg, 1962; Schrodinger, 1967; Prigogine, 1977).

The penetration of modern science into the world of atoms confirmed the relational or contextual view of reality. At the ultimate core, at the heart of the world, and the

universe, there is no fixed form, no solidity. Inside the atom, the nucleus is nothing more than a formless oscillating field, waves of rhythm in emptiness. Even the speed and position of subatomic particles are unclear. Entities like quarks have up-ness, down-ness, strangeness, charm, beauty, truth, but no matter. They are formless and exist only when they interact with something else. They have only relationship and pattern of vibration, shadows dancing in pure rhythm (Leonard, 1978, p. 34). A few types of elementary particles combine together to infinity like the letters of the cosmic alphabet to tell the story of galaxies, stars, light, heat, earth, and life. Physical space and form are the fabric made by this web of interactions (Rovelli, 2017 p. 150). These insights of science have far-reaching ontological and epistemological implications for our understanding of the world around and within us, as highlighted by several Nobel laureates, renowned physicists, and social scientists (Bohr, 1958; Heisenberg, 1962; Charon, 1977; Bohm, 1980; Spariosu, 1989; Smith, 2014; Capra, 2015; Wendt, 2015; Burgess, 2018).

In *Rḡveda*, believed to have been composed around 1500 BCE, the tenth chapter has a compilation of several hymns devoted to fundamental concepts of creation of existence from non-existence. Hymn 10.72, attributed to sage Bṛhaspati, is one of such hymns and it gives an insightful account of creation. In this hymn, called *Devah Sūkta*, the lord of sacred speech is seen as the craftsman who created the manifest reality from the unmanifest Absolute Reality. The manifest universe is seen as clouds of infinite particles of cosmic dust splashed out in the limitless sky by the dance-like movements of the Creative Lord. Cosmic dust plays an important part in creation by virtue of its formless fluidity and creativity, mediating between matter and spirit (Doniger, 2000, p. 39).

The *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* complements the knowledge of the Absolute Reality in terms of a thin essence, as minute as a hair divided a thousand fold, flowing in waves through strings extending from the heart to the surrounding body, as sparks proceeding from a blazing fire, from vital breaths to the sense organs, and from the sense organs to even hairs, and nails and to the worlds beyond. In this essence of life-breath alone, a person becomes one with the Absolute Reality. The speech together with all names, the sight together with all forms, the ear together with all sounds, and the mind together with all thoughts, arise from and exist in this life-spirit. He who understands this very life-spirit, overcomes all difficulties, attains pre-eminence among all beings, and supremacy in all situations (Radhakrishnan, 2007, pp. 790-91). *Tantrāloka* says that 'one's own nature consists of this one nature which is the nature of all things' (Furlinger, 2009, p. 48).

Rabindranath Tagore, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, expressed the vision of the *Upaniṣads* in his collection of poem *Gītāñjali*:

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures. It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers. It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean cradle of birth and of death, in ebb

and in flow. I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life. And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment (2018, p. 91).

It is an open secret that the pioneers of quantum mechanics, Bohr, Oppenheimer, Heisenberg, Einstein, de Broglie, and, in particular, Schrödinger were fascinated and inspired by Vedantic philosophy. Schrödinger essentially regarded the Vedantic worldview as an adequate theory for quantum mechanics, 'The unity and continuity of *Vedanta* are reflected in the unity and continuity of wave mechanics. This is entirely consistent with the *Vedanta* concept of All in One' (Burgess, 2018, p. 137). It was the integral vision of Vedantic scholars that made their philosophy comprehend several sciences which have become differentiated in modern times (Radhakrishnan, 2007, p. 11). This does not of course mean that the Vedantic worldview is identical with the quantum view of reality. There is a world of difference between the two approaches. At the same time, the complementarities between the two are too significant to be overlooked.

In the 1920s and 1930s, American linguists Sapir and Whorf proposed a 'principle of linguistic relativity' with an explicit reference to Einstein's theory of relativity (Leavitt, 2019, p. 18). In the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis:

every language is a vast pattern-system, different from others, in which is culturally ordained the forms and categories by which the personality not only communicates, but analyzes nature, notices or neglects types of relationships and phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness (2010, p. 251).

While this doctrine was new to Western science, it stood on unimpeachable evidence of the philosophical investigations known to exist in Indian culture (Whorf, 2010). In recent years a growing mass of research on linguistic relativity has developed in linguistics, allied fields of psychology, neuroscience and anthropology (Evans, 2010; Leavitt, 2011; Lee, 1996; Lucy, 1992; Sharifian, 2011; Wilce, 2017).

Application of new scientific knowledge in social science, and particularly in linguistics, emphasizes the social and contextual character of the language. Language is not a mechanical instrument that can be put on and off. It develops with the thinking process, and thinking develops with communication in context. In the ultimate analysis, in terms of quantum reality, language and thought may be seen as 'entangled', 'non-local', and 'inseparable'. Language is therefore essentially uncertain, probable, emergent, and always in a state of making or 'linguaging' even when it appears to be formal and definite. Contextual factors are inextricably bound together with language in ways that are enriching, complex, and dynamic (Massip, 2011, p. 57). Words do not have autonomous objective identities prior to their use in sentences. Every word that we use in real-world situations usually has several synonyms or related words in grammar which have a similar meaning and which could have been used in context.

Western linguists from Humboldt, Boas, Sapir, and Whorf onwards all have highlighted the ways in which the language is constituted and regulated by norms shared by a community of speakers and seen as social interaction and coordination rather than mere transmission and transaction (Wendt, 2015, p. 210). In recent years, cultural linguistics has emerged as a subfield of the discipline of linguistics to develop a framework that is particularly sensitive not only to the role of culture in linguistic choices, but also to the role of language in maintaining and transmitting the cultural concepts and values. The need to bridge the gap between 'language' and 'cultural context' has brought together researchers from a variety of fields to focus on problems of mutual concern from a new perspective and discover solutions that until now have not been visible (Frank, 2019, p. 507).

A distinguished contemporary Western scholar has observed that:

In spite of the importance of language as the distinguishing feature of human consciousness and the medium through which all human knowledge passes, the study of linguistics and philosophy of language in the West has only been seriously pursued in recent times. Today's modern scientific study suffers from focusing on the outer words, especially in the written words. Even a cursory look at the long and fully developed Indian study of language strongly suggests that the nature of the language may be more complex and powerful than the modern thought would lead us to suspect (Coward, 1980, p. 15).

SCIENCE OF RITUAL

The Vedas are often regarded as abstract and mysterious sacred books. If there is one thing the Vedas are not, it is books. Vedas are oral compositions in a language that was used for ordinary communication; and were transmitted by word of mouth like that language itself (Staal, 2008, p. xv). The Vedic *mantras* are patterns of human speech devised to assist the human mind to reach transcendental consciousness. The *mantric* compositions or formula-language is specialised to create a type of energy manifestation by activating and amplifying the vibrations in the subtle fields of energy or 'atoms of space' in the nervous system and the physical bodies. The resulting rhythm with the Absolute Reality streamlines the human organism to control, increase, and transmit manifold energies which the human organism normally transmits only at unobservable low intensities (Whorf, 2010, p. 248). *Mantra* is a concentrated form of speech, endowed with special potency and efficacy as it arises from more intense and one-pointed thought (Padoux, 1990, p. 373).

In the Vedic age, pure ecstatic practice and contemplation of phonetic sound echoing in the atmosphere through the sacred chant merged easily with the flow and sound of the river, on the banks of which such chanting and contemplation took place. 'With the river's raging as the background to the rhythmic recitation of inspired hymns on the banks of Sarasvatī, the association with speech on the one hand and music on the other

can hardly be overlooked' (Ludvik, 2007, p. 35). The consonance of sound waves of nature and the sound waves of Vedic chanting creates a rhythmic state of energy and consciousness. The resonance of chanting in chorus came to be called *nada*, and the river flowing by alongside came to be known as *nadī* (Berendt, 1991, p. 16). These names are cultural concepts which carry the contextual meaning in which socio-cultural reality is embedded. Sarasvatī is the goddess of the river of life-giving energy, and also of the coherent flow of insightful speech. As the river flows from the mountains to the ocean, it becomes identified with song, dance, and speech of the communities living by the riverside. The transformative aspect of rituals is firmly grounded in the Vedic tradition of oral recitation (Beck, 1995, p. 23).

The high degree of perfection achieved in the control of human voice by the poets and scholars in India produced the ability to differentiate and produce minutest intervals in speech sounds, to synchronize with the rhythm and harmony in nature.

The hymns of the *R̥gveda* as recited by the trained priest have such power, because they consist of the right sounds in the right combinations uttered in the right sequence and with the right intonation; and when they are so recited and accompanied by the right manual actions, they are irresistible. They are sure to accomplish the reciters purpose (Brown, p. 245).

This sensitivity to microtones is an indication of the care with which the 'culture of sound' was developed in India. It is still believed that such precision in the repetition of exact intervals, over and over again, permits sounds to act upon internal personality, transform sensibility, way of thinking, state of consciousness, and even moral character.

In order to explain their visionary experiences of the Absolute Reality, the Vedic thinkers chose the style of symbolism. The Vedic *mantras* use the names and forms of objects of creation to suggest the essence of the Absolute Reality.

The Ocean, Sky, Air, Water, Fire, Sun, Mountains, Rivers, Trees, Animals, Humans, Clouds, Rain and many more are objects in nature which stand out as alphabets of world language robed in silence, yet eloquent with exploding meaning that can be deciphered according to the intellectual attainment of each individual. The human body, eyes, ears, hands, feet, in-breath, out-breath, light, sound, movement - all these introduce us to a rich world of symbolical significance (Agrawal, 1953, p. iv).

The objects of Absolute Reality are an integral and essential part of all Vedic rituals, and they are considered as the connecting points of the relative and the Absolute Reality. The idea that nature and language are integrated has been well-known for ages in Indian culture which has maintained historical continuity much longer than Western culture (Whorf, 2010, p. 249).

This linguistic and cultural tradition in India established that the integration of the physical and mental, rational and spiritual, individual and social can be achieved through the development of sensitivity towards phonetic elements. The underlying

Absolute Reality behind all immanent objects is the same as the hidden reality behind spoken words, it is the transcendental Absolute unconditioned by all forms and names. Knowledge of correct speech not only conveys conventional meaning but also enables one to 'see' the Absolute Reality. This is the meaning of the term *darśana* which literally means 'sight'. This insight into reality sets Indian philosophy of language apart from modern Western perspectives on language which emphasize composition more than contextual relations (Coward, 1980, p. 33).

The Vedic rituals required the composition of a *padapāṭha* or 'word for word recitation' corresponding to the *saṃhitāpāṭha* or 'continuous recitation' of the Veda. This may have taken place between the tenth and the seventh century BCE. Its primary aim was to preserve the Vedic heritage, which in turn was required for recitation at the ritual (Staal, 1974, p.63). In the Vedic ritual, language appears in relation to gods as well as humans, and occupies the entire width of a spectrum from being a divinity herself to being a means used by gods to create the world, and ultimately to being a means in the hands of human beings to achieve their own ethical as well as social purposes. The priest-philosophers of the Vedic age were deeply concerned with the powers and limitations of speech as a means of communicating their visionary experiences, and this led them to think and discuss about the fundamental question of communication.

Specific hymns dedicated to *Vāk* or speech in *Ṛgveda* mention three stages in the development of language: (I) inarticulate speech, (II) primitive articulate speech, (III) language proper (Verma, 2016, p. 1). In *Ṛgveda*, several hymns indicate the power of speech foreseen in Vedic times. In particular, in the *Vāg Sūkta* in the tenth chapter of *Ṛgveda*, speech is considered as an unseen, all-pervading, creative, and liberating energy producing, sustaining, and extending all creation. It defends the cause of righteousness and freedom, removes ignorance, confronts and overcomes evil, and rewards the meritorious with riches (Doniger, 2000, pp. 62-63). It is remarkable that in these hymns of the *Ṛgveda* a semi technical vocabulary was already developed to deal with such linguistic matters as grammar, poetic creation, inspiration, illumination, and so on (Coward, 1980, p. 33).

In quantum science, waves or fields of energy are the substratum of all existence. Such concepts in modern physics seem to be complementary to the concept of *Vāk* in the hymns of *Ṛgveda*. If we replace the word *Vāk* with the word 'energy' in these hymns, we can almost reaffirm these statements from the point of view of modern science. Energy is in fact the essence that sustains life, is a source of all material things, and maybe called the imperishable and fundamental cause for all change in the world. Energy is that which moves the air, the water, the sky, the earth, and the sun. It can be changed into motion, into heat, into light, and into sound. This comparison, however, does not mean that the insights of Indian scholars were the same as knowledge acquired in modern science after centuries of experiments and mathematical calculations (Heisenberg, 1962, p. 29).

The intellectual roots of the science of linguistics in India lie in the methods developed for framing rules for complex Vedic rituals. On a philosophical level, ritual is probably also the origin of a leading idea behind grammar as well as other disciplines such as yoga in ancient India: that human activities can be analyzed and explained by explicit rule systems, and that performing those activities in awareness of the rules that govern them brings merit. These initial phonetic and phonological observations, which were piecemeal and ad hoc, were supplemented with similar observations pertaining to morphology, syntax and semantics, and all combined in a single generative grammar of spoken Sanskr̥ta. The main innovation was a methodology that applied the concept of the rule to the study of categories of words, word systems and word order, which corresponded to mathematical formalization (Staal, 1996, p. 43). The conditions of empirical adequacy, generalization, consistency, and methodology are easily met in the case of Vedic rituals, and these should be regarded as experiments and works of science (Staal, 1982, p. 31).

The major works on phonetics in ancient India fall into two main categories of linguistic texts, *Prātiśākhya*s and the *Śikṣā*s. The former are phonetic treatises relating to the pronunciation of the four Vedas during the rituals. The *Śikṣā*s on the other hand, are with some exceptions, less specifically related to a particular Veda, but in many cases supplement the teaching of the *Prātiśākhya*s. While it is likely that the *Prātiśākhya*s are based on an early *Śikṣā*, some of the available texts of the latter appear to be of later date than the former (Allen, 1953, pp. 6-7). It seems there was a correlation between *Śikṣā* and *Prātiśākhya*, leading to the advancement of both. Apart from these specific phonetic works, numerous observations on phonetic matters are to be found in the grammatical works, more specifically in Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*.

Very early in their explorations, the Indian phoneticians looked into the mental or neural bases of speech. The introductory stanzas of the *Pāṇinīya Śikṣā* are representative:

The soul, apprehending things with the intellect, inspires the mind with a desire to speak; the mind then excites the bodily fire which in turn impels the breath. The breath, circulating in the lungs, is forced upwards and it impinges upon the head, reaches the speech-organs and gives rise to the speech sounds. These are classified in five ways - by tone, by length, by place of articulation, by process of articulation and by secondary features. Thus the phoneticians have spoken: take careful heed (Ghosh, 1938, p.54).

In his pioneering study of the *Phonetic Observations of the Indian Grammarians*, Siddheswar Varma (1961) concluded that:

- The views of Indian phoneticians were not fanciful, but on the whole, sound and accurate observations, some of which may be helpful to modern philology.
- The language which they dealt with was not a grammarian's language but a living language which was in close touch with the experienced reality.

- The empirical adequacy of their observations regarding the pronunciation of Sanskr̥ta is generally corroborated by (a) the phonetic structure of Sanskr̥ta, (b) the evidence of inscriptions, (c) parallel linguistics.
- The *Prātiśākhya*s were not ‘dead *Prātiśākhya*s’ composed for priests who had to be drilled into a proper recital of the sacred texts but manifest a thrilling interest in the living phenomena of the language.

The *Śikṣā*s and *Prātiśākhya*s received the attention of various later commentators. In so far as they were the bearers of a continuous tradition, they were able to augment and elucidate the laconic brevity of the aphorisms. With the benefit of hindsight it seems that these early Indian phoneticians spoke in fact to the twentieth century rather than to the Middle Ages or even the mid-nineteenth century, and many a statement in these texts makes sense to the linguists, the physicists, and the neuroscientists today.

GARLAND OF LETTERS

The word used for the Sanskr̥ta and Hindi alphabet is *Varṇmālā*, or garland of letters. In Kashmir Śaivism, the word for phonemes is *mātṛkā* or mother, and *Varṇmālā* for the garland of the mother (Woodroffe, 2019, p. 227). The contextual meaning of these words conveys the cultural aspects of the concepts. It also shows that the Cartesian partition between science and spirit, which is based on the two-valued certainty of Aristotelian logic, is misleading. The processes of both art and science include formal rules, classification, generalization, and consistency. Therefore, the two processes, while not strictly similar, are not very different either.

Both science and art form in the course of centuries a human language by which we can speak about the more remote parts of reality, and the coherent sets of concepts as well as the different styles of art are different groups of words in this language (Heisenberg, 1962, p. 65).

Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī* (ca. 500 BCE), while providing a complete, maximally concise, and theoretically consistent analysis of Sanskr̥ta grammatical structure, is valued more because it reveals the spirit of India. (Feddegon, 1963, p. 68). *Aṣṭādhyāyī* is considered as the foundation of all traditional and modern analyses of Sanskr̥ta, as well as having great historical and theoretical interest in its own right. Western grammatical theory has been influenced by it at every stage of its development for the last two centuries. The early nineteenth-century comparativists learned from it the principles of morphological analysis. Bloomfield modelled both his classic Algonquian grammars and the logical-positivist axiomatization of his postulates on it. Modern linguistics acknowledges it as the most complete generative grammar of any language yet written, and continues to adopt technical ideas from it (Kiparsky, 2002, p. 1).

Aṣṭādhyāyī is formulated in a morphologically, syntactically, and lexically organised form of Sanskr̥ta. To maximize brevity with a minimum of ambiguity, rules are compressed by systematically omitting repeated expressions from them, according to a procedure modelled on natural language syntax. From the viewpoint of their role in the linguistic system, rules can be divided into four types: (I) definitions, (II) metarules, (III) headings, and (IV) operational rules. All the individual metarules in the Pāṇinīan system are part of a larger whole, they all come together in the larger domain of language. Coordination and certain types of compounding are assigned standardized interpretations. And the nominal cases of the language are used in a conventional way to designate the elements of grammatical rules.

Pāṇini gives a note of warning against extreme theorists who thought that grammatical rules cannot be applied in the absence of exact knowledge of events. He strongly defends the current social and linguistic usage as the best guide to decide theoretical definitions and questions. For him, the authority of usage of words must always supersede that of meaning dependent on derivation. Thus, instead of limiting himself to the treatment of accentuation, letter-coalescence, and declension of nouns and verbs, Pāṇini reached out to the wider context of the language in use at all levels of the society. He thus made social usage in all its comprehensiveness as the source material for living grammar (Agrawal, 1963, p. 349).

Pāṇini's grammar describes language as a little drama of life consisting of action with different participants, which are classified into role types called *karakas*, which include actor, goal, recipient, instrument, locative, and source (Kiparsky, 2002, p. 16).

Pāṇini's system envisages the structure of language as an evolving hierarchy of inter-category and intra-category relations, from the base of physical reality, the materiality of language, the intermediate levels of increasing consciousness till one reaches the highest level of consciousness - *Śabda Brahma* - where the linguistic phenomenon loses its autonomy and merges in the Absolute Reality. The Pāṇinīan system symbolizes the perfect blending of science and spirituality in India's linguistic tradition (Kapoor, 2010, p. 86). All words and meanings are different aspects of one and the same thing, strung together to form a beautiful garland of letters.

For the *Śabdikas* (grammarians), both the *Śabda Brahma*, and the conventional language are real. The former is logically prior to the latter. The latter emerges from the former, is sustained by it, and eventually merges into it. This process is not a metaphysical imagination but a physical reality. The substratum of both is the same, not just similar. Human beings have the potential and competence to be fully conscious of the Absolute Reality, the single universal substratum of all that exists, perceptible, and imperceptible. Generally, however because of inherently limited sense perceptions, human consciousness remains at the level of the objective universe which is a manifestation of the underlying Absolute Reality. In the Indian linguistic tradition, there is a persistent

refusal to take the objective language and the world it identifies and communicates as final. The enfolding and unfolding of the Absolute Reality in language and communication is a distinctive characteristic of India's linguistic tradition and culture.

A remarkable example of such cultural conceptualization in the language is the definition of the word *Indriyam* in Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*. Pāṇini derives *Indriya*, 'sense organs' from the word *Indra*, the name of the famous Vedic deity, in a short and beautiful *sūtra*, '*Indriyam, Indralingam, Indradrishtam, Indrasrishtam, Indrajushtam, Indradattam, Iti, Va*' (Vasu, 1988, p. 928). It means Indra symbolizes senses, Indra observes senses, Indra created senses, Indra celebrates senses, and Indra assigns senses. Thus, *Indriya*, the senses, are called so because *Indra*, the *ātma* or soul is inferred by the existence of the senses. *Iti Va* means that Pāṇini approves any other aspects of the concept given by learned sages which have not been included in the *sūtra* (Agrawala, 1963, p. 396). Such openness with regard to the observations of scholars and sages is found in *Mahābhāṣya*, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, and *Vākyapadīya* also, and it shows the scientific nature of India's linguistic tradition.

Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, believed to have been composed around 150 BCE, discusses in detail the rules from Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and Kātyāyana's comments on them given in his commentaries. *Mahābhāṣya* is a classic text in India's tradition of dialogue and discussion on the meaning and purpose of language. It analyses each rule of *Aṣṭādhyāyī* into its elements, adding comments necessary to the understanding of the rule. It attempts to bring out the full significance of Pāṇini's *sūtras* and explains the usages not covered by the rules or against the rules. Patañjali emphasizes that the purpose of studying grammar is to speak the correct language to achieve an understanding of the Absolute Reality, and also to achieve *dharma* (righteousness) in practice. Through the medium of grammar and the use of correct words, it is possible to be conscious of and become one with the Absolute Reality (Sastri, 2015, p. 28).

Similar integration and evolution from the particular to the universal can be seen in Bharat Muni's *Nāṭyaśāstra*. It is believed to have been composed around 100 BCE, *Nāṭyaśāstra* is a theatrical and literary composition that reflects a worldview and fundamental ideas which drew upon the well-articulated discourse in language and communication in the Indian intellectual tradition. *Nāṭyaśāstra* helps us to identify the sources on which the composition was based and the state of knowledge of linguistics at the turn of the millennium. Bharat Muni was not only familiar with the Vedas and their status in the Indian tradition but was well aware of their content, substance, and form. *Nāṭyaśāstra* traces both the spoken word and the idea of the word from the *Ṛgveda*.

Nāṭyaśāstra begins with a salutation to Brahma and Śiva, and the principles of theatrical presentation are attributed to Brahma. Several chapters in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* are devoted to verbal presentation, local usages, rules on the use of language, metrical patterns, gestures, and emotions etc. The language of *Nāṭyaśāstra* shows an understanding of the

use of different languages and dialects by different groups of people and throws light on recognition and acceptance of diverse people, languages, and dialects. The ethno-linguistic data in *Nāṭyaśāstra* is an important source for tracing the development of Indian languages from Vedic Sanskrit to Classical Sanskrit, Prākṛit, and the dialects. It treats the subject of language and communication, like Pāṇini, as rules, and each section is detailed in a very refined analytical manner. The whole is analysed into parts, and each part is examined in depth with a view to create an interconnected and interpenetrated whole again.

The presentation of the theatre was compared in *Nāṭyaśāstra* with the performative act of Vedic *yagna*. The mention of *sattva* or mindfulness, and the importance of musical sounds, during the presentation, are an instance of drawing upon the living and vigorous tradition of Vedas at that time. The smoothness and flow are representations considered so important that it is even mentioned that there is no word without rhythm and no rhythm without a word. Combined with each other they are known to illuminate the representation (Ghosh, 2016, p. 359). Elsewhere, the specific qualities of good composition and representation are described in detail and include focus, simplicity, precision, relevance, cohesion, agreeableness, and smoothness. A representation containing simple words, intelligible to the common man, using emotions and accommodating, and integrating people is considered good to be shared with people (Ghosh, 2016, p. 434).

The integral unity of the manifest and the unmanifest world, and its communication through a presentation is the core content of the Classic text. It integrates the world of essence, the world of reflection and feeling, with that of structure and grammar. In *Nāṭyaśāstra*, universality and specificity, abstraction and generalization, structured and flexible are seen as interdependent and interpenetrating levels of communication. It considers a presentation good if it can communicate at varying levels to different audiences in culture-specific and transcultural contexts. At the same time, while being in a finite time and place, it must have the power to communicate beyond time and place (Vatsyayan, 2016, pp. 89-90).

It is evident that Indian scholars postulated that communication has both phenomenal and metaphysical dimensions. Etymologists like Yāska, and grammarians like Pāṇini and Patañjali, and playwrights like Bharat Muni were clearly concerned with the context of real-life situations, but they did not overlook the umbilical relationship of the empirical, and the spiritual. Bhartr̥hari began with a metaphysical inquiry into the nature and origin of language in relation to the Brahma but also explored technical grammatical points in popular language.

For Bhartr̥hari, grammar is the remedy for all the impurities of language, the purifier of all the sciences, and the illumination of every branch of knowledge. By using correct speech, the mind becomes free of all subtle impressions of incorrect speech, and it

gradually rises to the level of *pratibhā* or direct and pure awareness. Such awareness is the essence of all phenomenal creation, and in such a state, all the differences and contradictions in the relative world are seen in the wider context of the Absolute Reality (Bhattacharya, 1985, p. 34).

These scholars avoided two reductionist mistakes that Western scholars like Aristotle made. First, they did not reduce language to the condition of merely a convention based on factual referents. Second, they did not resort to metaphysical reductionism that so devalues human language that it becomes obscure mysticism. In the Indian linguistic tradition, the study of a particular phenomenon and its exploration as a nouménal unity are not mutually exclusive. They are both considered as parts of a system's view of life and language (Coward & Kunjunniraja, 1990, p. 34).

SPIRIT OF LANGUAGE

While the seeds of the study of phonetics in India may be traced in the *Ṛgveda*, and the study of the structure of language was authoritatively established in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, a full-fledged statement and discussion of a science and spirit of language was given in Bhartṛhari's *Vākyapadīya* (Pillai, 1971, p. 12). Bhartṛhari begins his *Vākyapadīya* with metaphysical enquiry and then goes on to the empirical study of phenomenal language. In the first section of the work called *Brahmakāṇḁa*, are given the basic ideas concerning the concept of *Śabda Brahma*. In the second section called *Vākyakāṇḁa*, the fundamental idea of the integral nature of the sentence is discussed. The third section is the largest, in which grammatical topics mostly concerning words and their meaning are discussed. This section is called *Prakarankāṇḁa*. All the sections are interrelated and connected and form an integral whole.

There are rudiments of the doctrine of *Śabda Brahma* in Sanskrit texts right from the Vedas and the *Upanishads*, but an exhaustive postulation and discussion of *Śabda Brahma* are given in *Vākyapadīya*. It was Bhartṛhari who first systematically equated Brahma (the Absolute) with *Śabda* (language), going on to argue that everything arises as a manifestation of the *Śabda Brahma* (Coward & Kunjunniraja, 1990, p. 34). *Śabda Brahma* has also been defined as Communicative Brahma (Wilke, 2011, p. 629). Bhartṛhari harmonized the speculations of the *Sabdikas* with *Advaita* philosophy. He believed that grammar gives the foremost spiritual training and is the most important subsidiary text of the Veda. Grammar is a gateway to liberation, a cure to the blemishes of speech, and a purifier of all other disciplines. It is the first step on the ladder towards liberation and is the straight Royal Road for those desirous of that goal. The soul which has passed beyond errors in grammar can observe *Brahma* in the form of *Om* (Pillai, 1971, pp. 2-4).

In *Ṛgveda*, *Brahma* is used in the sense of sacred knowledge, or a hymn, or speech, the manifest expression of the character of spiritual consciousness. Sometimes speech is

personified as the Brahma. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, Brahma is seen as the Real of the real, the source of all existing things. *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* says, 'Brahma is the principle which unifies the world of the physicist, the biologist, the psychologist, the logician, the moralist, and the artist' (Radhakrishnan, 2007, p. 59). 'Brahma is the basic element and active force of all-natural and historic things and events' (Berendt, 1991, p. 17). *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* says that the four principles of Absolute Reality are *Brahma* the Absolute, *Īśvara* the Creative Spirit, *Hiraṇya-garbha* the World spirit and *Virāj*, the World. This is a logical succession and not a temporal one.

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* speaks of 'two forms of Brahma, the formed and the formless, the mortal and the immortal, the moving and the unmoving, the actual (existent) and the true (being)' (Radhakrishnan, 2007, p. 192). In the *Maitrī Upaniṣad*, language is seen as indistinguishable, uncharacterized, and unmanifest non-sound of Brahma. The differentiated sounds and words emerge and merge in the Supreme, the non-sound, the unmanifest Brahma. Thus, there are two Brahmas to be known, the sound Brahma and the non-sound Brahma, which is higher. Those who know the sound *Brahma* get to the higher *Brahma* (Radhakrishnan, 2007, p. 833).

Continuing in the Vedantic tradition, Bhartr̥hari sees Brahma as the imperishable Absolute Reality which is beginning-less and endless. The essence of the *Śabda* or language is derived from this Absolute Reality. The differentiated forms and names that derived from the *Śabda* constitute the objective world (Pillai, 1971, p. 1). Brahma and the *Śabda* are integrated. Brahma is in the *Śabda*, it is the Spirit of the *Śabda*. It is the Spirit that makes speech pervasive, powerful, and creative. It is the Spirit of the *Śabda* that makes the Vedas the *Śabda* of God. It is the Spirit of the *Śabda* that makes the speech move with gods and brings the knowledge to the sages. It is the Spirit of the *Śabda* that brings riches and successes to people in their lives. The Spirit of the *Śabda* is *Śabda Brahma*.

Bhartr̥hari's enquiry into the relationship of word and meaning in the *Prakarankāṇḍa* includes a clear analysis of the limitations and inadequacies of ordinary or secondary words to communicate all dimensions and levels of the Absolute Reality. Secondary words express only segments of Absolute Reality which are not autonomous, and the Absolute Reality in its undivided wholeness and flowing movement can never be expressed by the words and concepts of human language (Iyer, 1971, p. 105). As the well-known *Rgvedic* hymn says, speech merely recognizes and gives meaning to manifold forms arising out of the waters of the infinite ocean of ultimate reality (Kapoor, 2010, p. 5). *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* completes the message when it says, '*yato vaco nivartante, aprapya manasa saha, anandam brahmano vidvan, na bibheti kadacana*'. From where the words return along with the mind, only the one who knows that undifferentiated Brahma attains supreme bliss (Radhakrishnan, 2014, p. 545).

For Bhartr̥hari, the child and the scholar are in the same position as far as limitations and inadequacies of understanding and communication are concerned. Both understand

and communicate only part of the reality (Iyer, 1971, p. 107.). The common words, therefore, are unable to express the cosmic nature of reality. Words express the reality of any object or event in a manner that may be a misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the reality of the object or event. 'Words are based on cognitions which do not reveal the full reality and so present things in another form, not determined by their real form' (Iyer, 1971, pp. 105-107). Bhartṛhari emphasizes that in ordinary cases of language use, the literal form may not convey the intended meaning. In such cases, a thorough understanding of the context is required to avoid confusion and misunderstanding in communication (Pillai, 1971, p. 108).

In practice, words and language are used on the basis of bounded rationality. Ordinary people do not follow the understanding that may have been reached by scholars and sages, they understand things superficially and accordingly engage in communication. The *Prakarankāṇḁa* was an attempt to explain and organize words as used by the common people. The notions of action, substance, and quality, and so on used by the science of grammar are all worldly and secondary notions. Ordinary words can express only those aspects of reality which appear in our cognition. They do not touch the undifferentiated and un-manifest reality but move about in the world of differentiated and manifest reality (Iyer, 1971, p. 120). In a sense, we create some form of reality, for ourselves, just by speaking about it. This reality too, like the one created by sight, is relative. However, unlike sight, speech is uncertain and ambiguous, and therefore, it is free and creative, like the Absolute Reality (Ellul, 1985, p. 12).

Just as different perceptions reveal an object in a different form, similarly, meaning is understood from words in various forms. A word-meaning intended in a certain way by a speaker takes different shapes in different hearers depending upon the comprehension of each. Although the same object is perceived, its perception varies from person to person, and even the same person perceives the same object in a different form on another occasion. The same person at different times and different persons at the same time understand the meaning of the same word in different forms due to the different ways of understanding (Pillai, 1971, pp. 69-72).

When a word can give different meanings, how does one decide the most appropriate word in a particular context? Bhartṛhari refers to a list of factors which can help in making a proper decision with regard to the meaning of a word. The list includes complementary aspects, unrelated aspects, relevance, contradiction, the meaning of another word, situation-context, evidence from another sentence, and the proximity of another word. From this, it is evident that the form of a word by itself is not sufficient to provide the most appropriate meaning in all contexts. Meaning lies in the intention behind the spoken word and the context in which it is communicated and heard (Pillai, 1971, pp. 108).

When the word-meanings in a sentence are placed in a wider verbal and situational context, then a flash of insight, *pratibhā*, may be produced out of such a wider correlation. That flash of insight caused by a new connection or interrelation of word-meanings is described as the most appropriate meaning of the sentence. It is by no means describable to others in such terms as 'it is like this'. Having been formed out of the functioning of one's thinking, its nature is not known beforehand even to the person. The meaning is emergent from the contextual relationships and not inherent in the word.

Pratibhā or insight emerges from the combination and fusion of the different word-meanings, without being logically and rationally thought out in precision, and it is comprehended as seemingly taking the form of the holistic connection of the word-meanings. The interconnection has no defined form, and may be known as having a non-existent structure in the ultimate analysis. Such a flash of insight arises from recollection based on past experiences and its connection with the current experience. This recollection could be invoked by introspection, practical activity, or by advice from learned scholars.

In Kashmir Śaivism, *Vāk* is identified with *Kuṇḍalinī* or cosmic and human energy (Padoux, p. 125). Abhinavagupta considered *Śabda Brahma* the cosmic evolution of the Supreme energy *Kuṇḍalinī*, which emerges from the union of Śiva-Śakti. Śiva's energy manifests itself in *mātṛka* or phonemes. Language is the binder of the absolute and relative worlds, and the link between them because it shares the essence and nature of both which consists of *spanda* or vibration of Śiva's energy (Isayeva, 1995, p. 135). Language is both bondage and liberation, from ordinary and local to the universal Absolute Reality because it is a form of vibration of energy fields. Language is thus the power of insightful speech accessing the Absolute Reality from the diversity of manifestation (Kuanpoonpol, 1991, p. 70). *Spanda* connects the particular with the Absolute Reality. As an individual recognizes the presence of Absolute Reality, he 'sees' himself as the Absolute Reality (Pandit, 1997, p. 70).

The concepts of *pratibhā* and *spanda* even though not empirically or logically defined, seem to be more effective in communicating the nature of the Absolute Reality than the concepts of scientific language, which are derived from only limited groups of phenomena. In the scientific process of experimental verification and definition, the integral connection with the multidimensional and multilevel reality may be lost. On the other hand, natural language may represent some parts of reality much more clearly than by the use of scientific language because it can influence thought in ways which are not always logical and analytical, and also because of inherent limitations of logical reasoning (Heisenberg, 1959, p. 139).

An indirect and secondary meaning of the word which passes through the mind only momentarily may contribute essentially to the understanding of its meaning. The fact

that every word may cause many such diverse movements in our mind can be used to correlate different aspects of the reality and get clearer understanding than is possible by the use of strictly and narrowly logical reasoning (Heisenberg, 1959, p. 115).

Poets have often objected to the emphasis on logical reasoning which makes language less suitable for its purpose. Rabindranath Tagore, Nobel laureate in literature, believed that all poetry is full of symbolic expressions which communicate through suggestion all that is ineffable. If language were merely for expressing grammatical rules, then using such a language would be fruitless pedantry without a spirit. Since language has for its ultimate purpose the expression of ideas, our minds gain freedom through it, and the knowledge of grammar is help towards that freedom. When language assumes the harmony of forms and the balance of flow, it hints at the limitless that transcends words, 'like a lamp revealing light which goes far beyond its material limits, proclaiming its kinship with the sun' (Radhakrishnan, 2007, p. 944). Creative and ingenious thinkers like the *R̥gvedic* and later *Upanishadic* sages, employed poetic language to break open and extend the boundaries of expression to successfully communicate the hidden dimensions and levels of the ultimate reality (Matilal, 2014, pp. 151-155).

In recent years, researches in neuroscience have further confirmed the importance of broad concepts of natural language, rather than more logical and precisely composed definitions, in providing insights into the nature of reality. Neurological evidence has shown that when listeners encounter a word or concept, a semantic field related to the word is activated in the brain in which features properties and associations of that world are connected. In the left hemisphere of the brain, a relatively smaller semantic field of associations is strongly activated which closely relates to the dominant interpretation or the current context. On the other hand, the right hemisphere weakly activates a relatively broader semantic field that includes associations distantly related to the word or context. In this way, semantically distant words needed to understand metaphors, draw inferences and appreciate the many nuances of discourse can be accessed and integrated (St. George *et al.*, 1999, p. 1324).

The broader semantic relationship in the right hemisphere has one big advantage: The less sharply each word's meaning is specified, the more likely it is to connect with other words and concepts. This is a key ingredient for drawing inferences, extracting the essence, and comprehending symbolic language, and for insight and awareness of wholeness and integrated nature of reality (Kounios & Beeman, 2014, p. 6). Harmony between the 'left brain' and the 'right brain' provides an overall grasp of what is known in formal, logical terms, and also intuitively, in vision, feelings, and imagination etc. (Bohm, 1980, p. xvi). Original and creative ideas emerge from the coordination of well-structured language and concepts contained in the field of the empirical study with less sharply defined words and concepts in the field of philosophy and arts. Science and spirit are then in harmony, as they are different yet complementary ways of considering

the ultimate reality which is an undivided wholeness in flowing movement (Bohm, 1980, p. 33).

In Japan, the concept of *Kotodama* has been an important feature of the native Japanese language since ancient times (Miller, 1977, p. 262). To put it simply, *Kotodama* means 'Word Spirit' or 'Word Soul'. It shows that the ancient Japanese too believed that words had magical powers, and by uttering appropriate words all things in the universe could be controlled. The belief in *Kotodama* indicates people's faith in words and sounds, which is expressed in praying for good fortune or for the prevention of undesirable events. Verbal messages stemming from *Kotodama* belief are often seen in daily Japanese interaction, and people's interpersonal sensitivity leads them to be careful of their word choice and speech in verbal communication. Japanese people's use of pleasant language and gestures as a display of caring for others' feelings reflects the *Kotodama* belief in which they feel some kind of spirituality (Hara, 2002, p. 286).

In the modern age, rationalism makes it hard to understand just how the correct use of words can bring *pratibhā* or mystical insight, create moral power, and bring merit and success. Today we live in a world from which the spirit of the word has been abstracted, and in a sense, dehumanized, and therefore we experience some difficulty in understanding how powerful the spirit of words and sounds was for the deep and subtle oral culture of Vedic India. For Bhartrhari, for Vedic sages, *Sabdikas* Pāṇini and Patañjali, and playwright Bharat Muni, when speech is purified by the established correct forms and all deficiencies in the form of incorrect use are removed, there results spiritual righteousness which brings the experience of well-being and moral power (Coward & Kunjunniraja, 1990, p. 45).

CONCLUSION

The concept of *Śabda Brahma* enfolds a fundamental idea running through India's linguistic and spiritual tradition. This is the idea of the umbilical relationship of language and the Absolute Reality. *Śabda* or language belongs to the realm of the Absolute Reality, Brahma. As Rabindranath Tagore put it, 'the consciousness of the reality of Brahma is as real in Indian tradition as a fruit held in one's palm' (Radhakrishnan, 2007, p. 941). The Absolute Reality is knowable not on the basis of mere words, but on the basis of *pratibhā* or insight into the essence of words. Patañjali considers learning words without understanding as the dry logs on extinguished fire (Sarup, 1966, p. 19). *Śabdānusānam* or grammar as established in the texts by learned scholars of language in use is seen as a means to achieve consciousness of the Absolute Reality.

Śabda Brahma emphasizes that freedom and creativity of language are rooted in the Absolute Reality. This cultural conceptualization of the nature of language has far-reaching implications for our language and communication. Whatever the particular

language and the linguistic community, the spirit, and sound of the word emerge from and merge into Absolute Reality. Since language arises from and exists in Absolute Reality, it gains its power, freedom, and creativity from that source. When language is illuminated with the light of the Absolute Reality, then the limiting aspect of its separateness loses its locality, and our communication with others is not in a relationship of competition and conflict but of accommodation and integration in conformity with the order of nature. Language stemming from an awareness of the source of all speech, Brahma, the Absolute Reality, unfolds and uses complete awareness to create consensual and integrative communication.

The contemporary relevance of the concept of *Śabda Brahman* can be seen in the context of the social, economic, political, and ecological problems of our time which require solutions at the global level through mutual interaction and communication. *Śabda Brahma* is the language of the dynamic and interconnected Absolute Reality. Every nation, every government, every society, every race, every culture, every religion is essentially a manifestation of the Absolute Reality. Language and communication which is of the nature of the Absolute Reality connect them all. *Śabda Brahma* is infinite and uncertain, and this uncertainty is the source of its freedom and creativity. It has the power to fill the gaps that separate nations, communities and people. Enormous creativity is enfolded in the concept of *Śabda Brahma*. A deeper and wider understanding of the concept can help to establish a framework for further research and applied work in this direction.

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ŚABDA ŚAKTI

POWER OF WORDS IN INDIA'S LINGUISTIC TRADITION*

SUNIL SONDHI

ABSTRACT

*L*anguage is always cultural, it is shaped by and in turn, shapes the cultural context from which it emerges. In Sanskrit, and in Indian languages derived from Sanskrit, like Hindi and Bengali, the term Śakti has been a cultural concept since the Vedic age. "There is no word of wider content in any language than this Sanskrit term meaning "Power" (Woodroffe, 2019, p. 17). In the Indian notions about Śabda Śakti, meaning the 'Power of the Word', language is seen from the earliest times as creative power both at cosmic and human levels. Modern science sees energy as the ultimate form of reality. In India, language has been worshipped and used as a manifestation of the energy of the goddess Saraswati since the R̥gveda.

This article traces the evolution of the concept of Śabda Śakti from the time it first occurs in the R̥gveda. This cultural conceptualization of language continues later in the Atharva Veda and Yajur Veda in the form of religious and cultural practices. The development of the concept continues in other Indian classical texts like the Br̥hamaṇas, the Āraṇyakas, and the Upaniṣads, where Śabda Śakti is related to the origin of the universe, and where the umbilical relationship of the cosmic energy and human speech is recognised. These ancient notions of Śabda Śakti were restated and further developed in Kashmir Shaivism in the tenth and eleventh centuries. While the Vedas and Upanishads emphasized the contemplative aspect of Śabda Śakti, the Śaiva texts focused more on language as a moralized power which is active and can be used for action. The study of the Indian concept of Śabda Śakti as a cultural schema can be helpful in better understanding of cultural roots of language and communication in India and can contribute to further research in the field of cultural linguistics.

Keywords: Veda, Upaniṣads, Cultural Linguistics, Indian Culture, Intercultural Communication

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a trend of scholars' call, especially from the non-Western world, against the domination of Western paradigms in social sciences, particularly in linguistics and communication studies. Recent works in this field have questioned the appropriateness of the Western social science paradigms for the non-Western societies (Alatas, 2006; Chen, 2018; Glück, 2018; Gunaratne, 2010; Li, 2020; Miike, 2019, 2017, 2016; Mowlana, 2019). The main concern of these scholars is the unequal intellectual dominance of the 'professional center of gravity in the USA', and, to a lesser degree, European academics. As Western theories and concepts do not always reflect the issues and debates in developing countries, critics propose an epistemic shift toward a greater diversity of academic perspectives, leading to a greater diversity of fundamental theories, approaches, and concepts worldwide (Glück, 2018, p. 2).

Eurocentrism, a term often used for Westernism, has been defined as:

procrustean forcing of cultural heritage neatly into a single paradigmatic perspective in which Europe is seen as the unique source of meaning, as the world's center of gravity. Eurocentric thinking attributes to the "West" an almost providential sense of historical destiny (Shohat & Stam, 2014, p. 2).

As another contemporary scholar further elaborates:

The idea behind Eurocentricity in its most vile form, whatever its theoretical manifestation is that Europe is the standard and nothing exists in the same category anywhere. It is the valorization of Europe above all other cultures and societies that makes it such a racist system (Asante, 2014, pp. 6-7).

In the Indian context, the assault on its cultural traditions was first officially announced by William Wilberforce in his 1813 speech to the English Parliament in which he argued that the English must ensure the conversion of the country to Christianity as the most effective way of bringing it to 'civilization'. In 1835, Governor-General Macaulay knocked down the entire intellectual output of India in his absurd statement that, 'a single shelf of good European library was worth the whole native literature of India...' (Alvares, 2011, p. 73). It is distressing that even as India approaches seventy-five years of independence from British colonialism, so many educated segments and educational institutions in the country still continue to sustain the 'apemanship and parrotry' knowledge structure of the West (Alvares, 2011).

In a recent in-depth study on Eurocentrism, specifically focussing on Hegel's views on Indian culture and philosophy, Signoracci (2017), observes that Hegel 'had more to do with the suppression or exclusion of the Indian traditions from the history and practice

of philosophy in Europe and elsewhere than may be thought, and there is much to do to reverse this trend' (p. 253). He further observes that Indian philosophy's 'historical prominence and continuing vitality show its considerable sophistication and render it - perhaps not solely, but certainly uniquely - capable of posing a challenge to the assessment Hegel delivers' (Signoracci, 2017, p. 233).

J. S. Yadav, former Director of Indian Institute of Mass Communication, has observed that Western communication models and methodologies do not really help in understanding and explaining communication events, phenomena, and processes in the context of Indian society and culture. Western models and methodologies are not very appropriate for Indian conditions. He has emphasized the need to develop and refine the Indian or Eastern way of looking at language and communication and use appropriate research methods for studying communication events and processing (Yadava, 2018, p. 191). In Indian culture, saints and sages have traditionally been opinion leaders communicating the norms and values for righteous social behavior on the part of individuals. Their role as communicators who influence communication at various levels is important even today and needs to be studied to bring the Indian communication model closer to the lived reality of the people of India (Yadava, 2018, p. 194).

This article presents a conceptualization of language-culture relation in a combined cultural-linguistic perspective in the Indian context. The main perspective is cultural, and it draws on the religious and philosophical dimensions of Indian culture. The secondary perspective is linguistics, and it focuses on the linguistic flows as cultural flows globally (Palmer, 1996, p. 87). The Indian concept of *Śabda Śakti* is a cultural schema which is relevant for better understanding of the cultural roots of communication in India and in promoting intercultural communication.

CULTURED LANGUAGE

The relationship of language and culture has been at the center of the philosophical and linguistic conceptualizations in the Indian tradition since ancient times. These conceptualizations were never organized into a separate discipline, and these concepts were never explicitly formulated. 'It was essentially an interdisciplinary scholarship which either postulated common explanatory categories or developed parallel constructs with the same significance to make the models functionally optional and efficient' (Kapoor, 2010 p. 4). It is therefore most surprising that we find an almost total disjunction between the study of classical Indian philosophical and linguistic tradition and the modern theories of language and communication. Only recently have we seen a revival of interest in India in the heritage of our traditional knowledge (Kapoor, 2010; Matilal, 2014; Swarup, 2001; Tripathi, 2018; Vatsyayan, 2016).

A strong tradition of linguistic analysis developed in India in the first millennium BCE and has continued uninterrupted to modern times. The fields of phonetics and grammar were recognized at first. By the early fourth-century BCE, Pāṇini composed complete grammar of Sanskrit that generates utterances from basic elements under semantic and co-occurrence conditions. The grammar utilizes sophisticated techniques of reference, a formal meta-language, and abstract principles of rule precedence (Allen, 1953; Vasu, 1988; Kiparsky, 2002; Deshpande, 2011). The long tradition of grammatical commentary that followed Pāṇini's work investigated subtleties of verbal cognition in discussion with well-developed philosophical disciplines of logic and ritual exegesis. Linguistic analysis of Sanskrit inspired similar analysis of modern Indian languages.

The study of language and communication in India was never a monopoly of the logicians or the rhetoricians, as it was in Greece. Almost all schools of thought in India began their discussions from the fundamental problem of communication (Coward & Kunjunniraja, 1990, p. 3). The scholar-saints of the Vedic age were greatly concerned with the powers and limitations of language as a means of communicating their personal experiences of visionary nature to their kinsmen, and they tried to exhibit the power of language by various means. They praised the power of language by identifying it with the powerful goddess Saraswati ready to give desired results to her devotees. The entire creation was attributed by some sages to divine language, and it was generally accepted that the ordinary speech of mortals was only a part of that language.

The goal of Indian thought on language and communication is not merely rational knowledge but also experience of the Absolute Reality. Knowledge of language resulting in the correct speech not only communicates meaning but also enables one to experience reality. This is the meaning of the Indian term *darśana*, which literally means 'vision'. It is this feature that sets Indian linguistics apart from modern Western perspectives on language. From the early Vedas and *Upaniṣads*, the Indian approach to language and communication has never been limited to composition and transmission. All aspects of the mundane world and human experience were regarded as enlightened by language. Linguistics in India always had and continues to have both phenomenal and metaphysical dimensions (Agrawala, 1953, 1963; Jha, 2010).

Interest in studying the relationship between language and culture in the West emerged three thousand years later, in the eighteenth century. William Jones, Charles Wilkins, Franz Bopp, and Wilhelm von Humboldt were among the early scholars in Europe who became aware of the relationship of Sanskrit with the languages of Europe (Staal, 1996, p. 36). They explored the relationship between language, reality, and culture, and emphasized that diversity of language was one of the central facts about human civilization and potentially, at least, had implications for natural and social situations.

In the nineteenth century, the idea of 'linguistic relativity' was first clearly expressed by German linguists, Humboldt, and Herder who saw language as the expression of the

spirit of a nation, and the diversity of languages as the diversity of views of the world. This principle was further developed in the twentieth century with an explicit reference to Einstein's theory of relativity. This amounted to maintaining that the differences between the languages of the speaker and the listener had to be taken into account in any analysis of social and cultural life. Just as in Einstein's theory of relativity, the velocity and the direction of the observer had to be taken into account to determine those of any other person or object. Neither in the language nor physical reality, there was a fixed point or center from where everything else could be judged (Einstein, 1952; Heisenberg, 1962; Bohr, 1958; Bohm, 1980; Prigogine, 1997; Rovelli, 2017).

Around the same time, Franz Boas came up with the idea of cultural relativity, which holds that cultures cannot be objectively ranked as higher or lower, or better or more correct, but that all humans see the world through the lens of their own culture and judge it according to their own culturally acquired norms (Leavitt, 2019). Cultural relativity stresses the equal worth of all cultures and languages; it sees no such thing as a primitive language and considers all languages capable of expressing the same meaning through widely differing structures. Boas saw language as an inseparable part of the culture, and he was among the first to study and document verbal culture in the original language.

Different orientations adopted to study the relationship between language and culture are partly due to the difficulty in defining the terms language and culture. Views on language in recent years have ranged from language as action, language as social practice, language as a cognitive system, and language as a complex adaptive system. Culture has similarly been viewed differently by different schools of thought. It has been seen as a cognitive system, as a symbolic system, as social practice or as a construct (Sharifian, 2019, p. 3). These orientations are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The boundaries between theories, and between disciplines of study are always porous and dynamic, as indeed all aspects of reality are.

In the West, since the time of Aristotle, a view has been widespread that all humans think in the same way, and that language merely serves to code and communicate already formed thoughts. Such a view is fundamental to philosophical systems such as Cartesian rationalism, Locke's empiricism, and Kant's idealism. This kind of universalism is carried on today by the dominant mode of linguistics. People trained in linguistics and communication studies tend to see culture through the lens of language.

Culture is typically seen by linguists as a kind of extension of language. Among the people trained in fields like cultural studies, this language- determined view of culture is considered biased. From a cultural studies perspective, many features of human languages are entrenched in cultural concepts, including cultural frames, models, or schemata (Palmer, 1996; Sharifian, 2011). In his path-breaking book *Toward a Theory of Cultural Linguistics* (1996), Palmer observed that 'It is likely that all native knowledge of

language and culture belongs to cultural schemas and the living of culture and the speaking of language consist of schemas in action' (p. 63).

ABSOLUTELY REAL

India is the one country in the world, best exemplifying an ageless, unbroken tradition of speculations about language and communication (Padoux, 1992, p. 1). This linguistic tradition includes extensive explorations and rules of phonetics and grammar; diverse philosophies on the value and nature of language; and the phenomenal and transcendental power of language and communication. At one level, language has been identified in the Indian tradition with the Absolute Reality, the Brahma, and at another level, it has been identified with meaningful and disciplined speech, *Sabdānusānam*. Throughout the ages, theories and practices of language have evolved in India, elements of which can be identified, at different periods in time, in almost all of the thought systems that arose here (Staal, 1996, p. 2).

In India conceptualizations about language and communication constitute an intellectual tradition in which speech emerging at the time of creation is seen as creative and efficient power, the energy (*śakti*), which is both cosmic and human. This creative power can be accessed by human beings through structured language, which serves as a medium or channel through which knowledgeable and skilled persons can reach the higher levels of coherence and cohesion of language and reality. These conceptualizations are present as early as the Vedas and maintain continuity through texts on phonetics (*śikṣā* and *prātiśākhya*), the epics (*Mahābhārata*), the works of grammarians (*śabdānusānam*), the *Upaniṣads*, the philosophies (*darśanas*), and the texts on the arts (Varma 1961; Sastri, 2015; Ranganathananda, 2015; Tagore, 2018; Tripathi, 2018).

The earliest conceptualization of language as *śakti* can be found in the Vedas, where the notion of the creative role of language is present widely, most significantly in *Rgveda* Book X. Hymn X.71 which speaks of rare and shining treasures hidden in language which are disclosed to those who have the insight and affection in their speech. When language is used with insight and care, it wins the cooperation of other persons (Saraswati trans., 2015, pp. 809-15). But only those who make the effort and have the right intention can speak and comprehend language in the right way. A person who has not understood the essence of the spoken word can only use language that is superficial and hollow. Good communication skill comes to those whose words are trustworthy and reflect the integrity of the person. People have similar sense organs, but their comprehension and expression are not the same. Knowledge and experience enable a person to use the power of words to understand and conceptualize reality in the most beneficial way. An energized, dynamic, and knowledgeable person is successful in practical life and wins goodwill and admiration in society (Sondhi, 2020, p. 6).

Hymn X.125 goes further and extols the powers and grandeur of the speech goddess in a lengthy *Vāk Sūkta*. It identifies and glorifies *vāk* or speech as supreme power which supports the gods and the sages, and their position in the cosmic and the phenomenal world. It gives strength and treasures to the faithful ones who perform their duties. In this hymn, speech is identified with the cosmic energy and at the same time with the voice of the people of knowledge and action in human society. While the power of the speech is considered to be of the nature of cosmic energy, and which resides with the gods, at the same time, this power and energy is within the reach of people who have faith and whose knowledge and action make them trustworthy (Saraswati trans., 2015, pp. 1113-1117).

In these two hymns, one can see the seeds of later flowering of Indian conceptualizations of language and communication in connection with both the absolute and the apparent reality. The integrative and flowing movement of language between the grossest and subtlest levels of reality is the core of the Indian concept of communication.

The *Upaniṣads* continue the Vedic tradition of recognizing the value of language for human beings for realizing their material and spiritual goals. While references to speech and language can be found in most of the *Upaniṣads*, two representative selections from *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* and *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* beautifully sum up the conceptualization of language as cosmic energy in these texts. In Chapter VI.2, speech is considered as the abode of the Absolute Reality, Brahma. The Absolute Reality resides in speech; it is supported by space, and deserves to be honoured as consciousness. By speech alone, one identifies the people with whom one can cooperate, acquire the knowledge that is in the texts, interpretations, and activities. The Absolute Reality is, in truth, speech. By recognizing and imbibing the true value and energy of speech, one can even become a god (Radhakrishnan, 2007, p. 246).

In *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, in Chapter II.16, the essence of all the Vedic texts is said to exist in the syllable *Om*. It can be compared with the metaphor of the seed given in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* to indicate that the essence of the tree exists inside the invisible depths of the seed. Similarly, a single syllable, indestructible *akṣara*, is seen as the microcosmic formless essence of the Absolute Reality. Knowledge of this everlasting spirit gives the capability to a person to achieve all that he desires in life (Radhakrishnan, 2007, p. 616). Words are a real spacetime sample of illimitable and dimensionless cosmic energy, constituted of matter, radiation, light, consciousness, and action. This text from *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* asserts that there is nothing that an insightful person cannot achieve through the knowledge and use of proper language, which is a symbol of the divine energy (Padoux, 1992, p. 18).

From the Vedic times, the language had divine and human quality at the same time. There is no contradiction here. Indian conceptualizations of language and

communication are holistic and practical, and they are far from being mere imaginations unrelated to objective reality. This is brought out even more clearly in the texts of Bhartṛhari and Abhinavagupta in the later periods (Iyer, 1971, 1992; Pillai, 1971; Furlinger, 2009). These texts are based on the integral relationship established between language, the Absolute Reality and objective reality. The Absolute Reality or divine energy or Brahma, and Śiva in its essential nature are speech, and activity through speech. Everything related to language, communication and objective reality has an umbilical relationship with the Absolute Reality. Since the Absolute Reality is all-pervasive and omnipresent, and since everything emerges from it, language is a manifestation of the un-manifest Supreme reality.

The ancient Indian notions about the nature and power of the word or speech appearing in the Vedas, *Upaniṣads*, and the Grammatical texts are further developed with identical or very close meanings in *Kashmir Śaiva* texts (Padoux, 1992, p. 5). In these texts, such as *Parā-Triśīkā-Vivarṇa* and *Śiva Sūtra*, the essentially symbolic role of *kuṇḍalini* as energy that is both cosmic and present within human beings is repeatedly emphasized to emphasize the correspondence between human and the cosmic levels (Jaideva trans., 2017, 2017b). From this energy, which is all-pervading and is of the nature of *Śabdabrahma*, a familiar concept in Bhartṛhari's *Vākyapadīya* (Iyer 1992; Pillai, 1971), *Śakti*, or phenomenal power is generated, which in turn leads to the four levels of speech: *Parā*, *Paśyantī*, *Madhyama*, and *Vaikhari*. It is in the last stage of *Vaikhari*, that human language and communication become manifest. Language is made of three powers of will, cognition, and action, and it is endowed with the properties of created things, which include the cycle of birth, growth, and transformation. Language thus becomes an integral part of the Absolute Reality, conceptualized as *Śabda Śakti*.

Śakti is the cosmic energy that manifests the general potential creativity of Śiva into specific names and forms of *śabda* or sound. The most pervasive principle that Abhinavagupta uses in his texts is *sarvam sarvatmakam*, variously translated as 'everything is related to the totality', 'every part is related to the whole', 'omnifariousness', and 'omnipresence of all in all', 'everything is of the nature of all'. This doctrine has antecedents going back to *Atharva Veda*, where Indra's Net symbolizes the cosmos as a web of connections and interdependences (Malhotra, 2016, p. 4).

Abhinavagupta not only espouses and applies this principle, but he also goes into an extensive interpretation of a verse from *Mahābhārata* which exemplifies this Omnipervasiveness (Baumer, 2011, p. 270). The *Śāntiparva* verse 47.84 says that 'Everything is in you. Everything is from you. You Yourself are Everything. Everywhere are you. You are always the All. Salutations to you in your form as Everything' (Shastri trans., 2011, p. 146). An earlier verse, 47.47 of *Mahābhārata*, throws more light on deeper roots of the concept of *Śabda Śakti*. It says:

Roots with all kinds of affixes and suffixes are your limbs. The *sandhis* are your joints. The consonants and the vowels are your ornaments. The Vedas have declared you to be the divine word. Salutations to you in your form as the word (Shastri trans., 2011, p. 143).

Śakti, the divine power, is the essential nature of the Absolute Reality itself. It is the radiating, pulsating, vibrating, brilliant, dynamic, and absolute free power, which is essentially pure light and supreme joy, the core, the heart of Reality, of everything. In its different forms and stages, it is the essential nature of all that exists in the world. *Śakti* is in a blade of grass, a dust particle, humans, rocks, water, trees, animals, a spiral nebula in the sky, an atom, a thought, a sensation, and in *akṣara* and *Śabda* - and at the same time, it transcends the world and is in Brahma. In this way, the Kashmir *Advaita* notion of *Śabda Śakti* is closer to the *Viśiṣṭa Advaita* of Ramanuja than the *Advaita Vedānta* of Śaṅkara (Furlinger, 2009, p. 249).

Abhinavagupta's conceptualization of language and reality in *Tantrāloka* makes it abundantly clear that unity and diversity are the aspects of the same integrated wholeness which is in a state of constant vibration or pulsation (*spandan*), and change. In verse III.100 of *Tantrāloka*, Abhinavagupta explicitly says that if the Absolute Reality did not manifest itself in infinite variety, but remained enclosed in its own singular unity, it would neither be the supreme power nor awareness. It is the nature of the Absolute Reality to expand and diversify in infinite forms. Incessant creativity is the essence of its absoluteness, and this is the eternal source of all linguistic forms and constructions (Jaideva, 2017b, p. xxi).

From the foregoing, it is evident that the primary concern of Indian thought on language and communication has been its efficient and discerning use for human good, and this does not exclude divinity. The original word identical with the divine energy is seen in this perspective as phonic energy, which is eternal, indestructible, subtle, and illimitable, which, however, evolves and unfolds through different stages and forms, and brings forth, names, or identifies, minutely and precisely various kinds and dimensions of objects. Language, then, is inherently endowed with creative energy. The creative energy precedes the object, it is the creative energy of the Absolute Reality in the form of speech that defines and upholds the objects, their relations, and the entire order of nature.

MORALIZED POWER

Ethical and practical issues in the process of intercultural communication have received significant scholarly attention in recent years. From a review of recent works in this regard, Miike (2019) has formulated five principles of communication ethics from a practical perspective: mutual respect; reaffirmation and renewal; identification and indebtedness; sustainability; and openness. The Indian linguistic and communication

tradition is a testimony of the abiding value of these principles, both in theory and action.

At the outset, we must know that the word *Śakti* comes from the root *Śak* which means 'to be able', 'to do'. It indicates both activity and the capacity to do so. In a sense, everything exists in the world, and its each constituent element is *Śakti*. But this activity is not random, anarchical, or disorderly action. The concept of *Ṛta* in the Indian tradition stands for order and coexistence. Everything that exists in the world and beyond is in an order which sustains the system and its parts at the same time. Power translated to the material plane is only one, and the grossest aspect of *Śakti*. But all the material aspects are limited forms of the great creative and sustaining power of the Absolute Reality, the Brahma or Śiva. *Śakti* is moralized by the essential unity and coexistence of all diverse forms in the Śiva the Absolute Reality, which is inclusive, interrelated and interdependent. *Śakti* is, therefore, always in the service of the right, the good, and the moral (Woodroffe, 2019, p. 122).

In the Indian linguistic and cultural tradition, goddess Saraswati is a symbol of *Śakti* or creative energy at both cosmic and human levels. Saraswati is the most important cultural symbol and source of all thoughts, insights, speech, and learning. Meanings, meaningful language, names, forms, and objects are also believed to have originated from her. She is the creator of all arts and music too. Above all, she is the source of life-giving perennial rivers which sustain all creation on earth (Ludvik, 2007). This *Ṛgvedic* ideal of language, thought, and action runs through Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, Bharatmuni's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Bhartr̥hari's *Vākyapadīya*, and Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka*, to name just a few of Classical texts in India's long and insightful linguistic tradition which is the core of Indian culture (Agrawala, 1963, 1953; Ghosh, 2016; Iyer, 1971, 1992; Baumer, 2011). This tradition is the reverse of trying to have control or command over the language to 'accomplish some tangible business goal' or change the way others think and feel (Garcia, 2014, p. 235). Language and communication in the Indian tradition is considered as divine energy to be used in speech with utmost care and affection to bring people together for the collective good, or *Dharma* and keep them away from evil or *Adharma*.

This practical and ethical view of language and communication is most clearly brought out in the concluding verses of the *Ṛgveda*,

The light of lights which illuminates all life and elements, which enlightens speech in the form of supreme word "Om", may bring prosperity to all. Let us all walk together, talk together, and think together to acquire knowledge, and live together like knowledgeable people for the common good. Let our meetings, thoughts, feelings, and consciousness be for common objectives. Let us all have the collective determination to bring our hearts and minds together so that we can live together in harmony (Saraswati, 2015, pp.1265-66).

The Sanskrit root *Sam*, which means together or common, is writ large over all the prayers in *Rgveda* and other Classical texts and even in modern Indian languages. Two words *Sanskṛiti*, and *Sanskṛit*, may be translated as culture and language. The root for both words is *Sam*. Both culture and language are thus understood in India in terms of common creation or heritage. Even the word *Samvad* which means communication has the same root, *Sam*, and the same essence - togetherness. The Indian parliament, *Samsad*, is again, togetherness.

Nirukta, considered the oldest Indian treatise on etymology, philology, and semantics believed to have been composed around 500 BCE (Sarup, 1966, p. 54), maintained that the Vedic language was the only language that corresponded very closely to the composite and dynamic nature of the reality at both absolute and apparent levels. Since the Absolute Reality is both integrated and dynamic, the *kṛyā*, denoting *karma*, or action is the primary part of the sentence and all other parts of the sentence - the subject, the object, etc. - are only modes of the word (Raju, 2009, p. 66). The words denoting activity are to be considered as primary and the rest as secondary. Words, sentences, and language asking us to act in order like cosmic energy are important and other sentences are subsidiary (Raju, 2009, p. 67).

Pāṇiniya Śikṣā mentions six merits of a good speech that connects the speaker and the listener in the right manner politeness, clarity, distinctive words, right accent, and time adherence. The six demerits are singsong manner, nodding of head, too fast speed, written script, low voice and ignorance of meaning. Speech that is made with defective accent or pronunciation is considered poor and not capable of connecting with the listener in the right manner. In fact, it may convey a wrong meaning that will do more harm than good to the speaker. A good and effective speaker should observe proper accent and places of articulation, use proper gestures, and above all know the meaning of what he is saying (Ghosh, 1938, pp. 72-79). These fundamental rules of good speech formulated by Pāṇini continued to be followed by Patañjali, Bharatmuni, Bhartṛhari, and Abhinavagupta, and are considered crucial for good communication even today.

Mahābhārata mentions politeness in language as one thing that can bring glory and success to a person who practices this communication skill (Shastri, 2011, p. 271). In *Bhagavadgītā*, which 'coined hundreds of the words that we use in daily life' (Radhakrishnan, 2007, p. 9), learning from Classic texts and practice of disciplined speech is advocated for communication that is truthful, beneficial, and polite. The Indian Classical texts formulated these principles of good communication more than three thousand years before Dale Carnegie wrote the bestseller, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. The Indian view of language and communication is a holistic and dynamic that joins, links, coordinates and brings people together. Not in the sense of monotonous uniformity, and not in the sense of erasing all the differences but in the sense of unity in diversity, shared commonalities along with differences. This tradition

of insightful, accommodative, and integrative speech is India's major contribution towards building '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam*' or a global family (Sondhi, 2017).

In the *Upaniṣads* also, this practical and ethical aspect of language is re-emphasized. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* says that 'if there were no speech neither right nor wrong would be known, neither the true nor the false, neither the good nor the bad, neither the pleasing nor the displeasing Speech, indeed, makes all this known' (Radhakrishnan, 2007, p. 470). In *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, after teaching the Veda, the teacher instructs the pupils to speak the truth, practice virtue, practice welfare, achieve prosperity, continue study and discussion, and perform duties to gods and parents (Radhakrishnan, 2007, p. 537). The importance of activity is stressed in *Isa Upaniṣad* when it says that one should wish to live a hundred years, always performing works (Radhakrishnan, 2007, p. 569). The *Upaniṣads* generally conceive the Absolute Reality as the light of lights. Light is the principle of communication. In this sense, language is the expression of the character of the Absolute Reality (Radhakrishnan, 2007, p. 62).

The Indian communication model may be seen as holistic, innermost, and multidimensional coordination through the creative power of language. That is, language and communication that originate from all dimensions of being – physical, emotional, rational, cultural, and spiritual, and seeks to reach out to as many aspects as possible of the listener. Inherently, then, language evolves out of clear understanding of the wider social, universal and cosmic context of the speaker and the listener. A primary assumption of this view is that the coordination we so earnestly seek does exist in all languages. Our ideas, feelings, and language spring from the rich foundation of our common human and cosmic identity, at the most fundamental level, we are part of the same fabric of being amidst all existence.

CONCLUSION

Problems in language and communication within and between different cultures and societies stem from a complex web of linguistic, social, and cultural factors that go beyond any individual or situation. To find a solution to this problem, we need to look within a society and examine the disconnect between its language and culture. India's rich linguistic heritage is embedded in its composite and integrated culture. It is, therefore, imperative that problems in language proficiency and competence in India should be resolved on the basis of the cultural foundations of Indian languages.

The Indian communication model is based on the structure of language as an ascending hierarchy of connections between the base level of physical reality, the materiality of language, through intermediate levels of conceptual abstraction, to the highest levels of abstraction - *Śabda Brāhmaṇa* or *Paramāśiva* – where linguistic merges with Absolute Reality. While the connection of the elementary linguistic terms with sense perceptions of everyday experiences is established in practice, comprehension of the connections

between our sense perceptions in their totality require logically derived concepts at different levels of abstraction, based on primary concepts. The concept of Śabda Śakti symbolizes the creative energy of language that connects and integrates the grossest and subtlest levels of abstraction with agility, ingenuity, and beauty.

This communication model to a large extent is shaped by the *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads*, the diverse philosophical schools and traditions, and a treasure of ideas and practices stemming from India's composite cultural heritage. This legacy contributes to a diverse and yet coherent Indian way of communication in a flowing movement. Only a few of such classical texts have been studied so far with regard to their contribution towards the evolution of an Indian communication model. Towards this end, Indian Classical texts relating to language need to be explored further and relevant ideas stemming from them adopted for integrative and accommodative language and communication in India and the world.

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ŚABDĀNUSĀNAM

THE INTEGRAL VIEW OF COMMUNICATION*

SUNIL SONDHI

ABSTRACT

The rationale for this paper is that the negative trends in present-day communication in media and public language in India seem to have formed a complex web of social and political factors in certain sections of society that go beyond any individual, ideology, or situation. To find a solution to this problem, we need to look within and examine the disconnect between the roots of language in the Indian society and the use to which language is being put by people in certain sections who are not connected with India's linguistic tradition of the discipline of words. It is in this context that the classical texts on communication in India need to be explored and relevant ideas adopted for integrative and accommodative communication. Exploration of the Indian intellectual tradition in communication is also relevant in the context of the emerging trend of scholars' challenges from the non-Western world against the appropriateness of the Eurocentric paradigm of communication. It is argued that the entire focus in India's linguistic tradition has been on restraint and discipline of words 'Śabdānusānam' in accordance with prescribed norms derived from wider social context to achieve meaningful and harmonious communication in the society.

Keywords: Linguistics, Communication, Vedic, Śabda, Vākya

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INTRODUCTION

Scholars have written about three idioms of Indian society: the modern, the traditional, and the saintly. The modern signifies the language of constitutional politics and administration. The traditional refers, in contrast, to religion and community and to the language of rural India. The saintly represents the language of Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, and Anna Hazare- *ahimsa, bhoodan, swadeshi and seva*. In the first few decades of independent India, all three idioms co-existed. Today, a fourth idiom has been added to sections of our society, and, sadly it seems to have eclipsed the other three. This is the language of disharmony.

This language of disharmony is divisive and disintegrative, for it has crossed the red line of inclusion. In addition to the culture of inclusion that is undermined by such language, it also leads to a culture of violence. When language is filled with courtesies, replete with the protocols of respect, it produces restraints on bad behavior in the mind. Although we may have the inclination to hurt an opponent, when the speech culture is respectful, it will psychologically restrain the inclination to hurtful speech or action. In contrast, the spread of abusive speech weakens such restraints.

Today, fury and incomprehension of words have eroded the minimum standards of courtesy and mutual respect in communication, especially in cyberspace. We seem to be increasingly unwilling to even try to find common ground with which to engage with people whose views differ from ours. Such violent language achieves its impact by denying any complexity, conditionality, or uncertainty. It exaggerates wildly to make its point. It is built on a presumption of bad faith on the part of the other person. It accepts no responsibility to anyone to explain anything to anybody but instead treats the facts as they were a matter of opinion (Thompson, 2016, p. 17).

In still many more cases, when the words are not violent or offensive, they are still inane. People merely gossip and chat. Though they talk so much, they have little to say. This is true particularly of academicians and journalists in urban India. They speak compulsively, mechanically, in jargon. They use many and big words for a few and small things. Their debates, seminars, and writings are nothing but words reacting to words with little sense of relevance and reality (Swarup, 2001, p. 91).

A healthy language knits people together and, ultimately, it leads to a better and more inclusive society. But when communication loses its power to explain and engage, it endangers the bond of trust between people. The critical risk from bad communication is not only in the realm of culture but also in the legitimacy and sustainability of social and political cohesion. When the public discourse of a country gets vicious and partisan,

democratic society as a whole start to fall apart. The loud-mouthed rhetoric based on half-truth instead of bringing people together breeds anger, hatred, and division in society.

An integral view of communication, on the other hand, is one that joins, links, coordinates, and brings people together. Not in the sense of monotonous uniformity, and not in the sense of erasing all the differences, but in the sense of unity in diversity, shared commonalities along with differences. One way we can frame integral communication is to describe it as a holistic, innermost, and multidimensional exchange. That is, communication that originates from all dimensions of being – physical, emotional, rational, cultural, and spiritual, and seeks to reach out to as many aspects as possible of the listener. Inherently, then, integral communicators will use inclusive approaches and language that evolve out of clear understanding of the wider social and universal context of the speaker and the listener. Integral communication could be the bridge between the traditional and modern idioms of Indian and society.

A primary assumption of this view is that the *Sahridayata* or identity we so earnestly seek does exist in all exchanges (Mishra, 2005, p.93). Our ideas, feelings, and beliefs spring from the rich foundation of our common humanity and cosmic identity; at the most fundamental level, we are part of the same fabric of being amidst all existence. Conflict may, therefore, be due to misperception between different manifestations of the same unmanifest reality, and communication can be viewed as coordination to accommodate and integrate multiple manifestations of the ultimate reality. However, regardless of how that accommodation and coordination are defined, the commonality principle has been understood and practiced by very few, and there is instead a strong tendency to put people into different, hierarchical, and even opposing categories. The objective of integral communication is to understand and appreciate the universal aspect of being, and the interdependent nature of everyone and everything.

It is the argument of this article that the negative trends in communication stem from a complex web of social, political, and cultural factors that go beyond any individual, ideology, or situation. To find a solution to this problem, we need to look within and examine the disconnect between the roots of language in the Indian society and the use to which language is being put by people who are unaware of India's linguistic tradition of *Sabdānusānam* – the discipline of words. It is in this context that the Classical texts on communication in India need to be explored, and relevant ideas need to be adopted for integrative and accommodative communication. Exploration of the Indian intellectual tradition in communication is also relevant in the context of the emerging trend of scholars' challenge from the non-Western world against the appropriateness of the Eurocentric paradigm of communication being used in non-Western societies (Miike, 2002; Servaes, 2000; Dissanayake, 2003, 2009; Yadava, 2008; Chen, 2003).

SACRED SPEECH

Language has been one of the fundamental issues of concern in India's intellectual tradition over the ages. It has received due attention from thinkers since ancient times. The study of language has occupied the minds of not only grammarians and literary figures but also of poets, philosophers, and playwrights. All schools of thought in the Indian philosophical tradition began their discussions from the fundamental problem of communication. Generally, the approach to the study of problems of language and communication has been characterized by both analysis and synthesis. Whereas systematic efforts were made to analyze words in terms of stems and suffixes, sounds and elements, at the same time, rules of joining the elements and the words in a compound word or sentence were learnt from usage and organized.

The need to interpret and preserve the vast oral Vedic literature of great antiquity required linguistic thought and analysis. This literature had been transmitted through generations by a strong tradition of verbal communication. The reliance on orality was motivated in part by the power of spoken words to invoke the intervention of the gods. In the Vedic tradition, if the text has been learned in the proper way, and by the proper person then the power of the word, when spoken, is irrevocable - the gods *must* act, and will act. The utterance of an invocation was thus automatically what modern speech-act theorists would call a *performative* speech act. In the saying of the word, something is also *done*, and cannot be undone. The Indian literature is full of tales in which a word was misused, uttered capriciously or wrongly with mischievous or even disastrous consequences. The term 'magic' comes to mind here, and in some ways, the power of words can be seen as magic; but this is not mere magic.

Maintenance of pre-eminent Vedic texts in the oral tradition depended a great deal on the sound pattern, word structure, and understanding of meaning. This led to the development of thinking about language in the pre-Pāṇinian period. That the thinking about language, its structure, and meaning began very early in India is proven by the fact that the Vedic literature has several references to thoughts on speech, language, and meaning. The Vedic thinkers considered language to be a very important factor as a source of bringing happiness and togetherness in human life. It was considered as a means of understanding the true meaning of objects and attaining the desired objectives. The results attained by the Indian thinkers in the systematic analysis of language have surpassed those arrived by any other nation.

The Sanskrit grammarians were the first to analyze the word forms, to recognize the difference between the root and suffix, to determine the functions of the suffixes, and on the whole to elaborate grammatical system so accurate and complete to be unparalleled in any other country (Macdonell, 1927, p. 136).

The Vedic literature clearly identifies Brahma (the Absolute) with language (*Śabda*). The *Asyavamiya Hymn* in Chapter One of *Ṛgveda* states that the ultimate abode of language is Brahma. Language is described as being the peak of the universe. It also says that 'Speech has been measured out in four divisions, the Brahmans who have understanding know them. In that three divisions are of hidden speech, men speak only the fourth division.' Here language is related to cosmic order and is understood as the idea of the word as distinct from the spoken word. The spoken word is a limited manifestation of the inner word that reveals the truth (Harold Coward, 1990, p. 35).

In Chapter Ten of *Ṛgveda*, hymns seventy-one and one hundred twenty-five establish the significance of speech and language for the thinkers in Vedic times. Hymn seventy-one speaks of the excellent and spotless treasures hidden in speech which are disclosed when there is affection in the utterances. People with wisdom use speech that wins them friends. Only those who make effort can speak and hear good speech. A person who has not understood the essence of speech can only utter words that are hollow. A good speech comes to those whose action is good and who do not disown friends. People have similar eyes and ears, but they do not have similar qualities. People who are neither knowledgeable nor hard-working can only have meaningless speech. An energetic, dynamic and knowledgeable person succeeds in society and wins praise from friends (Saraswati, 2015, pp. 809-15).

In Hymn 125, the speech goddess celebrates her own power and grandeur in a lengthy *Vāk Sūkta*:

- I. *I move with the Rudras, with the Vasus, with the Adityas and all the gods and sages. I am in both air and water, both energy and fire, and both earth and sky.*
- II. *I carry the flowing Soma, and Sun, and energy and riches. I bestow wealth on the pious sacrificer who presses the Soma and offers the oblation.*
- III. *I am the queen, the confluence of riches, the wise and industrious one who is first among those worthy of worship. The gods divided me into various parts, and I enter in many places and many forms and give them strength.*
- IV. *The one who eats food, who truly sees, who breaths, who hears what is said, does so through me. Though they do not realize it, they dwell in me. Listen, what I tell you should be heeded.*
- V. *I am the one who says, by myself, what gives joy to gods and men. Whom I consider worthy by knowledge and action I make great; I make him a sage, a wise man, a Brahmana.*
- VI. *I stretch the bow for unleashing storm, so that it will strike down the hater of prayer. I arouse and enact the battle for people against evil and I pervade earth and heaven.*
- VII. *I establish the guardian on the head of this world. My origin is within the ocean. From there I spread out over all creatures and touch the very sky with the crown of my head.*
- VIII. *I am the one who blows like the wind, embracing all creatures. Beyond the sky, beyond this earth, so much is my greatness.*

(Saraswati, 2015, pp.1113-1117)

In this extensive hymn dedicated to the speech goddess, language is considered worthy of worship, and it is seen as energy co-existent with every object in this universe. It is considered as a sustainer of life, a source of success and riches. It brings knowledge and wisdom and is the force behind the power of goodness.

This identity of Brahma with language is also found in the *Upaniṣads*. In the *Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, Brahman is identified as the one reality, without a second one, which is identified with language. The *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* links the unspeakable absolute with the speakable word through the symbol of *Aum*. *Aum* is described as connecting the manifest world with the Supreme Reality. Brahma is identical with language, the basic manifestation of which is the *Aum* (Coward, 1990).

To understand whatever Indian grammarians said about language and communication, one has to remember this philosophical background in which the grammarians made their observations. In this metaphysical background, all language and communication are a manifestation of the ultimate reality, the *Śabdatattva*, the essence of the word. The speaker, the words which he utters, the objects which the words denote, and the listener are all emanations from the ultimate word-essence. 'The cosmic process with its names and forms arises from the subtle essence of Pure Being' (Radhakrishnan, 2007, p. 462). This fundamental concept of the identity of the universal and the particular has been validated by modern science which has shown that every particle in the universe takes its characteristics from the pitch and pattern and overtones of its particular frequencies in a vibrating universe (Leonard, 1978; Charon, 2005; Berendt, 1991).

Yāska's *Nirukta* composed around 600 BCE may be regarded as a link between the earliest Vedic tradition and the later Pāṇinian system of language and communication in India (Belvalker, 2015, pp. 5-9). Yāska's primary objective was to interpret the Vedic texts correctly so that the benefit of the knowledge of the Vedas could accrue to both the speaker and the listener. In the Vedic tradition, knowledge of the Vedas required the ability to speak the words in the right accent and rhythm. To keep the oral form pure and disciplined in its presentation, it was necessary to use the words precisely and effectively. Only thus could the words become a part of one's consciousness in the act of speaking.

Yāska sought to establish the correct meaning of the words used in the Vedic texts by tracing them back to the "verb roots" (Kapoor, 2019, p. 151). He believed that without this exercise the exact meaning of the Vedic *mantras* cannot be known. He said that if anything was learnt without being understood, it was meaningless and was like trying to ignite dry logs of wood by placing them on ashes of extinguished fire. For him, meaning was the flower and fruit of speech. Yāska's major contribution was in his attempt to specify the meaning in terms of the root verb or activity. In determination of

meaning, he took into account the rich context of historical, geographic, cultural, social, psychological, and philosophical factors of the time. The factors involved in the process and their correlation constituted a whole theory of meaning and power of the words (Kapoor, 2019, p. 155).

LIVING LANGUAGE

Pāṇini marks the watershed period in the evolution of India's intellectual tradition in the field of grammar and linguistics. Before Pāṇini, the study of language was primarily descriptive, concerned with an empirical analysis of language usage and language structure. It culminated in Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, subtitled *Sabdānusānam* in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, translated as discipline or system of words, which was composed around the fifth century BCE. It is an explicit, rule-based, comprehensive description of both the spoken language and the compositional language (Kapoor, 2010, p.10).

Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* represents perhaps the first attempt in the history of the world to describe and analyze the components of a language on scientific lines. It has not only been universally acclaimed as the first and foremost specimen of descriptive grammar but has also been the chief source of inspiration for the linguists engaged in describing languages of different regions. 'A very remarkable work it is, providing a model for recent and contemporary work in descriptive linguistics that can stand with the best efforts of modern analysts' (Coward, 1990, p. 15). After Panini, there was development of grammatical thought in India into areas beyond description, from theory of grammar in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, to the use of language and communication in performing arts in Bharat Muni's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, to the philosophy of grammar and of language in relation to thought and reality in Bhartr̥hari's *Vākyapadīya*.

Pāṇini undertook an exhaustive investigation of the spoken and the living languages of his times. He applied the inductive method in finding, collecting, and classifying his materials for developing his grammatical system. As an untiring and trustworthy witness of linguistic data, he reached out so far and wide that almost every kind of word in use during his time was brought in for analysis. He had sharp insight into the true meaning of words in all their aspects and bearings as they were being used in different localities, Vedic schools, families, trades and social classes of his times. The *Gaṇa-Pāṭha*, as an accessory treatise to the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* introduced a comprehensive principle of classification by which a large mass of linguistic data was reduced to order, system and simplicity. By this method Pāṇini was able to integrate comprehensive social, economic, political, cultural and geographical details with grammatical rules.

Pāṇini had explored and taken into consideration vast sources of linguistic material in the country including the dialects, folklore and local custom, names of places, eastern

sports, names of coins, weights and measures, etc. Pāṇini's travel across the length and breadth of the region in search of data from the living language and the method of personal interaction to get information was marked by an intensely practical approach in the pursuit of knowledge. It was more than clear from his approach that he looked at language and communication as social processes and not merely as tools of the learned people (Agrawala, 1953, p. 19).

Pāṇini's work was considered by Patañjali' as a vast ocean of science. Patañjali' also described how Pāṇini's work was based on the materials and sources available in the different schools of learning, and it was recognized as a further development of all of them. He pointed out that for Pāṇini to have such an authority among the grammarians, his works must have been vastly superior to all the numerous treatises which were in existence before Pāṇini's time. These included works of renowned scholars of Sanskrit like Śākatāyana, Gārgya, Yāska, Śaunaka, Sākalya, Bhārdwāja, Āpiśali, and Audavrji, who had significantly contributed to the study of language during that time.

It is thus evident that Pāṇini's approach was accommodative and integrative, and he was able to acknowledge and appreciate the views of others in a spirit of recognition and inclusion. He avoided extreme views and positions and preferred a path of synthesis between conflicting theories. For example, it is well-known that the question whether a word denotes a whole category (*jāti*) or only an individual (*vyakti*) was being debated amongst the grammarians at an early stage. This became a subject of sharp controversy subsequently, but Pāṇini clearly showed in his work that he held both views, one in one context and the other in another (Shastri, 2011, p. 41). Similarly, Pāṇini took a practical view in the discussion of time on the exact definition in which subtle and elaborate arguments were often given by his contemporary grammarians. Pāṇini maintained that it was not within the purview of grammarians to lay down rules about particulars of time and tense durations. For such regulations, one must depend on the usage of the day.

What mattered more to Pāṇini was the total, real social environment in which the language developed and worked. The practical and the ideal, the particular and the general, and the transient and the permanent existed side by side in Pāṇini's analysis as he viewed language as a system of meaningful sound and a practical tool of communication in a community structured as a social organization. The scope of language use was vast, it could be used to communicate and coordinate experiences in the inner and outer worlds. Language mapped by Pāṇini was open and flexible, governed as it was by the context of its usage.

Pāṇini's travels in search of facts from the living language and method of personal discussion and interrogation to elicit information were in the true manner of the

Takshasila style, which was marked by a practical bias in the pursuit of academic studies (Agrawala, 1953, p. 17).

Pāṇini's goal was building up of Sanskrit words from their root forms, affixes, verbal roots, and their function in a sentence. The underlying principle of Pāṇini's work was that nouns are derived from verbs. Patañjali had also maintained that a sentence cannot be framed without a verb. He explained *kriya* as a transaction or interaction. According to him, the basic linguistic unit is a word – provided it generates a meaning. Following the view of Patañjali, Bhartr̥hari defined *kriya* as 'made up of all actions, whether accomplished or unaccomplished, which are expressed as being accomplished because they have a definite sequence.'

Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, a commentary on Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, commences with the statement '*atho sabdanushasanam*': here begins the discipline of words (or, here begins the rules governing the words). The three important subjects that Patañjali deals with are all concerned with words: formation of words; determination of meaning; and, the relation between a word (speech sounds – *Śabda*) and its meaning. He also stressed the need to learn grammar and use correct words; to understand the nature of words whether or not the words have fixed or floating meanings and so on.

The Pāṇinian system was analyzed and developed by both Kātyāyana and Patañjali. In fact, Pāṇini, Kātyāyana, and Patañjali are known as the 'three sages', *munitrayam*, who gave the rules of discipline of words. 'Each took for his study the whole field of living language, and the contribution made by each to the stock of inherited knowledge and ideas is quite considerable' (Belvalker, 2015, p. 22). All the three sages were of the view that the word, its meaning, and their relation could be analyzed and standardized from their usage in the world. When the standard meaning of word is prescribed in *Śāstra* and word is used in practice only in such meaning, it supports in upholding the established system of social order (Subrahmanyam, 2008, p. 3).

INTEGRAL HARMONY

Bharat Muni's *Nāṭyaśāstra* is believed to have been composed around 100 BCE, reflects a world view and fundamental ideas which drew upon the well-articulated discourse in language and communication in the Indian intellectual tradition. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* helps us to identify the sources on which it was composed and the state of knowledge of linguistics at the turn of the millennium. Bharat Muni was not only familiar with the Vedas and their status in the Indian tradition, but was well aware of their content, substance and form.

Nāṭyaśāstra traces both the spoken word and the idea of the word from the *Rigveda*. The integral unity of the spoken world and the undifferentiated word, and its

communication is the foundation of the Classic text. It integrates the world of essence, the world of reflection and feeling, with that of structure and grammar. Thus, universality and specificity, abstraction and generalization, the structured and flexible are seen as interdependent and interpenetrating levels of communication. Language must communicate at varying levels to different audiences in culture-specific and trans-cultural contexts. While being in finite time and place, it must have power to communicate beyond time and place (Vatsyayan, 2016, pp. 89-90).

The presentation of the theatre was compared in the text with the performative act of Vedic *yagna*. The mention of *sattva* or mindfulness, and the importance of musical sounds during the presentation are an instance of drawing upon the living and vigorous tradition of Vedas at that time. The language of *Nāṭyaśāstra* shows understanding of the use of different languages and dialects by different groups of people and throws light on recognition and acceptance of diverse people, languages and dialects. The ethno-linguistic data in *Nāṭyaśāstra* is an important source for tracing the development of Indian languages from Vedic Sanskrit to Classical Sanskrit, Prākṛit and the dialects. It treats the subject of language and communication, like Pāṇini, as rules, but each section is detailed in a very refined analytical manner. The whole is analyzed into parts, and each part is examined in depth with a view to create an interconnected and interpenetrated whole, again.

A whole chapter is devoted in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* on verbal representation which speaks about the nature of verbal representation as well as rules of grammar. At the outset, the importance of words is emphasized as these are considered to be the body of the expression. At the same time, gestures and emotions are considered important for clarifying the meaning of words. The smoothness and flow in representation is considered so important that it is even mentioned that 'there is no word without rhythm, and no rhythm without a word. Combined with each other, they are known to illuminate the representation' (Ghosh, 2016 p. 359). Elsewhere, the specific qualities of good composition and representation are described in detail and include focus, simplicity, precision, relevance, cohesion, agreeableness, and smoothness. A representation containing simple words, intelligible to the common man, using emotions and accommodating, and integrating people is considered good to be shared with people (Ghosh, 2016, p. 434).

The integral view of communication that emerges from *Nāṭyaśāstra* is most clearly visible in the theory and practice of *rasa* or taste and *bhāva* or attitude which is developed as a psycho-somatic system by establishing coordination between the mental and physical. Here Bharat Muni shows a deep understanding of the integration of mind, body, and speech (Ghosh, 2016, pp. 684-87). This is the foundation of the entire work. There is an intrinsic relationship and coordination of mind, body, and speech. Different

combinations emerging from this relationship lead to different states of mind which are manifested in various emotive states. These states of mind of the speaker and the listener are the major determinants of the connectivity in communication. Integral and harmonious communication depends on combination of speech, gestures, and mind. For this, one should take special care about the focus of the mind. It cannot be produced in an absent minded man. This is something invisible, but it helps to control emotions and state of mind. An ideal performance depends on coordination of all acts (Ghosh, 2016, p. 584).

Bharat Muni's assertion that *Nāṭyaśāstra* is the fifth Veda which will be open to all castes and classes, and would include all levels of time and place, all spheres of knowledge, and all crafts and arts, shows the integrating role of communication in the society. He seeks to integrate not only diverse disciplines but also bring together all aspects of life - mental, physical, and even metaphysical. All this is sought to be achieved through the refinement of the senses and sense perception. Although Bharat Muni speaks of the theatre, it lays the foundation of integral communication which is not restricted to any particular area of social interaction.

The integrative and interpenetrative nature of the physical, psychical, individual, social, horizontal, and vertical aspects of the Supreme Reality accounts for a very distinctive attitude writ large in *Nāṭyaśāstra* of the interdependence and interconnection of body, speech, and consciousness. *Nāṭyaśāstra* provides the clear framework for an integral harmony in which equilibrium, balance, and harmony of the physical, linguistic, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual levels is considered essential. In composing *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Bharata Muni had 'fully internalized the discourse on the senses and sense perceptions as articulated in *Upaniṣads*' (Vatsyayan, 2016, pp. 54-55). It provides the most refined statement of a world-view which was conscious of the process of gradual refinement from one level of sense perception to the other and the need for restraint and discipline in reaching the highest level of consciousness (Vatsyayan, 2016).

UNIFIED VISION

It is interesting to note that initially the ancient grammarians did not devote as much attention to sentence and its structure as they did to the word. The noted grammarians like Pāṇini, Kātyāyana, and Patañjali were mainly concerned with the derivation of the correct form of words. Yāska and other etymologists were also primarily occupied with word-meanings. Even the *Nyāya-sūtras (Commentaries)* of Vatsyayan emphasize the nature of individual words.

Subsequently, long debates were held on the question: 'what is the basic unit of the language that gives forth a meaning? Is it the word (*śabda*) or the sentence (*vākya*)?'

Though the discussions took several positions, it was ultimately concluded that the letters constitute a word; and, the words come together to form a sentence. It was pointed out that just as a word has no separate entity without its constituent letters; similarly, a sentence has no separate entity without words that give it a structure. It was also said that though the words are parts of a sentence, the meaning of the sentence does not independently arise out of them. Meaning is the function of the sentence as a whole. It is the emergent property of a systematically constructed sentence. Though the distinction between a sentence and its parts was recognized, it was said to be mainly for day-to-day purposes (*loka-vyavahāra*) and for analytical studies undertaken by the grammarians.

Bhartṛhari's *Vākyapadīya* is considered a milestone of the philosophical development of grammar in India. Dissanayake (2003) sees a refreshing relevance of *Vākyapadīya* to modern communication studies. He claims that the basic thinking reflected in *Vākyapadīya* is in perfect consonance with some of the modern conceptualizations in the field of communication. Dissanayake considers four important streams of thought contained in the *Vākyapadīya*.

- I. The notion of *sphota* which can be understood as *śabdatattva* or the word essence that is disclosed by the word.
- II. The contention that there is no cognition in the world in which the word does not figure, and all knowledge is intertwined with language.
- III. The emphasis on the total sentence as the unit of meaning as opposed to most other of his contemporary scholars stress on the need to recognize the word as the unit of meaning.
- IV. That contextualization of speech facilitates the circumscribing of the field of discourse, thereby eliminating ambiguities of meaning.

The central idea that emerges from a study of *Vākyapadīya* is that the ultimate reality is of the nature of the *śabdatattva* or *sphota*, (Iyer, 1992, p. 402). All of us are born with the essence of speech within us, which is also a source of knowledge. Proper understanding and use of language is a discipline by following which a man can be successful in his endeavors and attain liberation. Bhartṛhari deserves the credit for putting together, for the first time, in a somewhat logical sequence all those general and particular notions which form the basis of the forms of the Sanskrit language (Iyer, 1992).

Bhartṛhari connected the general notions of the words and their meaning with their wider and deeper metaphysical context. He claimed that his metaphysical understanding was derived from the Vedic tradition, and it is also true that his writings were influenced by the works of all the major grammarians who preceded him. His

writings are linked with those of his predecessors, and he was continuing the intellectual tradition established by Pāṇini, Kātyāyana, and Patañjali.

Bhartṛhari regarded the sentence as a single 'integral symbol'; an indivisible unit of communication. The meaning of an integral sentence could be grasped by an instantaneous flash of understanding *Pratibhā* or perception through insight or intuition. The complete and true meaning of a sentence can be achieved only by means of such 'intuitive perception' and not through a dissection and analysis of the words and letters. Just as a letter or a syllable has no parts, so also the sentence is to be taken as a complete integral unit and not as a collection of smaller elements.

According to Bhartṛhari, the gross sound pattern, *Dhvani* or *Nāda*, is a sequence of sounds. Those sounds are employed to convey or give an audible form to the intent of the speaker. Those audible sounds through their divisions and time sequence produced one after another by the speech organs, act as a means or as vehicles to transport the intent of the speaker. Such quanta of sound-sequences might create an impression as though they were independent; and, the meaning intended to be conveyed by them comprised several parts. But, in truth, the individual words have no disintegrated existence; and, both the sentence and its meaning are integrated. A word form conveys a cluster of meanings, and one must distinguish between possible and intended meaning, and usual and contextual meaning. The factors that determine the meaning to be assigned to a linguistic form in a particular sentence include among others: the sentence; general context; spatial context; temporal context; probability; and accent.

Another pertinent observation made by Bhartṛhari in this respect is that a linguistic form does not illuminate its objective unless it is consciously used for that purpose. Therefore, language expresses its meaning only if it is intentionally and knowingly used for that objective. Language needs to differentiate and discriminate and be precise and specific so that its meaning may be clearly understood. To give an example, mere repetition and cramming of Vedic linguistic elements is meaningless, and the same Vedic expressions can be better explained and understood depending upon the intention of the speaker (Coward, 1990, p. 150). This observation has been vindicated by recent researches which have shown that more than ninety percent of the impression that a speaker has little to do with the words and more to do with integrity and credibility of the speaker (Maxwell, 2010, p. 49).

In a similar way, Bhartṛhari makes it clear that the established system of right conduct and social order cannot be refuted by clever arguments or reasoning based on expedience. If this were to be accepted, than the same argument or reasoning can be refuted by an even more clever argument. This shows the limitations of the use of bare words or hollow words. In another text on the technique of debate, in *Khaṇḍanakhāṇḍakhāḍya* by Śrī Harṣa, it is suggested that skills for refuting any

argument or reasoning can be imparted to any novice (Tripathi, 2016, p. 237). It is for this reason that Bhartṛhari had to say that social order is not established by reasoning dissociated from the established system, even a conclusion arrived at after great consideration by clever logicians can be rejected by others who are more trustworthy (Pillai, 1971, pp. 6-8).

CONCLUSION

The ever-flowing stream of India's linguistic tradition does not allow one to come to a conclusion. At best, one can hint at the confluence of several streams of ideas that converge to enrich the tradition of linguistic thinking in India and make it relevant in the present times. The first and foremost principle that emerges from the Indian linguistic tradition is that while language may emanate from within, it is a social, and in a sense, cosmic phenomenon. Communication cannot take place in isolation from the social and physical reality. Effective communication is always multidimensional and always involves interaction. Language always has to take into account its effect on people. It needs to be adapted if it is recognized that it is not being understood, or it is being misunderstood. The test of virtue in language lies in practice. The choice of words must depend on how the public relates to them; and on changes in the social and cultural context in which the communication takes place; as facts become outdated or as new developments require attention, language must conform. Adapting to change is not a sign of weakness of language, inclusion makes the language stronger, not exclusion. It always has to be a living language to be meaningful.

The second principle is that words matter. Words are shaped by worldviews, and they in turn shape worldview. Words provoke action and reaction, which in turn provoke more words. Getting the words right is critically important. Words are carriers of meanings well beyond the literal. Words trigger frames and images that may lead to several meanings. As has been expressed clearly in the *Ṛigveda*, the real significance of speech is that it creates or fashions out the manifold names and forms, *nāmarūpa*, from the waters of the infinite ocean of the ultimate reality. Metaphors (*rūpaka*), which stand for something much broader than the literal meaning, are particularly powerful carriers of content, of emotional resonance, as made abundantly clear in *Nāṭyaśāstra*. When the accepted meaning of word is prescribed in the texts and the word is used with such meaning, it supports in upholding the social system as it is itself a social system (Radhakrishnan, 2007, p. 167).

Finally, and most importantly, the importance and role of intention is most vital in the process of communication. All the knowledge and consciousness of the ultimate reality and the identity of speech with the ultimate reality is of little use if the human being does not consciously put this knowledge of correct usage into practice. The entire focus in India's linguistic tradition is on restraint and discipline of words in accordance with

prescribed norms derived from practice to achieve meaningful and harmonious communication in the society. The metaphysical and the spiritual is not the conclusive end of the intellectual quest of the Indian grammarians. The purpose of all the reasoning and discussions is to refuse to take the popular as the final word and go beyond the apparent to higher levels of refinement of language. The world has to be regained by the use of integral communication because both the word and the world have their source in the ultimate reality. It's the man who can make the word and the world in the image of the Supreme Reality.

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