

The Metaphysics of Sound: Analyzing Śabda-Brahman and Sphoṭa in Bhartṛhari's Vākyapadīya

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Abstract: *This article explores the linguistic monism of the fifth-century philosopher-grammarian Bhartṛhari, focusing on how his foundational text, the Vākyapadīya, elevates Sanskrit grammar (Vyākaraṇa) into a rigorous metaphysical system. Central to Bhartṛhari's philosophy is the assertion that the ultimate reality is Śabda-Brahman (the Word-Absolute), which manifests into the material universe through four distinct cosmological strata of speech (Vāk): parā, paśyantī, madhyamā, and vaikharī. By examining this vertical descent from unmanifest consciousness to physical utterance, this paper contextualises his revolutionary theory of Sphoṭa the holistic, instantaneous flash of semantic comprehension that bypasses sequential phonetic accumulation. Moving beyond a purely historical analysis, this study offers a comparative critique, contrasting Bhartṛhari's internalist semantics with Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralist dualism and Ludwig Wittgenstein's early picture theory of language. Ultimately, this paper argues that Bhartṛhari's framework does not merely anticipate modern cognitive linguistics, but offers a unique onto-epistemological model wherein semantic resolution is inherently tied to spiritual liberation (mokṣa), positioning language as the primary vehicle for metaphysical inquiry.*

Keywords: Bhartṛhari, Vākyapadīya, Sphoṭa, Śabda-Brahman, Philosophy of Language, Vyākaraṇa.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the landscape of classical Indian philosophy, Sanskrit grammar (Vyākaraṇa) transcends the boundaries of mere linguistic syntax to operate as a profound system of metaphysics. While early grammarians like Pāṇini and Patañjali laid the structural and analytical foundations of the language, it was the fifth-century philosopher-grammarian Bhartṛhari who explicitly elevated linguistics to an ontological discipline in his seminal treatise, the Vākyapadīya. Bhartṛhari posits that the ultimate reality is Śabda-Brahman the Word-Absolute an eternal, imperishable consciousness from which the phenomenal universe manifests through the medium of speech (Vāk). Central to this cosmological framework is his revolutionary theory of Sphoṭa, which conceptualizes meaning not as a piecemeal accumulation of phonemes, but as an indivisible, instantaneous flash of holistic comprehension within the mind of the hearer. This paper examines how Bhartṛhari's linguistic monism bridges the gap between semantic theory and spiritual liberation (mokṣa). By analyzing the four levels of speech (Vāk) alongside the mechanics of Sphoṭa, this study argues that Bhartṛhari does not merely offer a philosophy of language, but rather constructs a philosophy as language, offering profound insights that anticipate and challenge contemporary Western models of cognitive linguistics and semiotics.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The intersection of linguistics and absolute metaphysics in Bhartṛhari's *Brahma-kāṇḍa* remains a primary focus of contemporary scholarship. Scholars argue whether Bhartṛhari's Monism of Speech (Śabdādvaita) serves as an



extension of Vedic cosmogony or a distinct grammatical philosophy.¹ Early researchers, such as Harold G. Coward and K. Kunjunni Raja, demonstrated that Bhartṛhari did not invent the linguistic Absolute; instead, he systematized the Vedic tradition where *brāhman* was tied to sacred ritual speech. They map how *Śabda-tattva* (the word-essence) acts as the ultimate uncaused ground of all phenomenal existence.² Tandra Patnaik's *Sabda: A Study of Bhartrhari's Philosophy of Language* examines the precise metaphysical mechanism of *vivarta* (apparent transformation).³ Patnaik notes that unlike the later *AdvaitaVedānta* of Śaṅkara which reduces the objective world to an illusion (*māyā*) Bhartṛhari's *śabdādvaita* posits the physical world as a real, structured projection of the divine Word-Principle. Recent studies confirm that for Bhartṛhari, consciousness is fundamentally linguistics. Scholars highlight his foundational assertion that no thought or cognition can exist in the universe without being permeated by language.

2. Epistemological and Semantic Dimensions of the Sphoṭa Theory

The cognitive mechanism through which a listener grasps meaning from ephemeral sounds is the core linguistic breakthrough attributed to the *Vākyapadīya*.

Scholars like Bimal Krishna Matilal have extensively deconstructed the etymology of *sphoṭa* (derived from the root *sphuṭ*, meaning "to burst or spurt"). Literature clarifies that *sphoṭa* is a non-physical, psychological entity a sudden "flash of intuitive insight" (*pratibhā*) that unifies fragmented vocalizations into a coherent mental whole.⁴ Sharda Narayanan's *Vākyapadīya: Sphoṭa, Jāti and Dravya* illustrate how Bhartṛhari championed the absolute indivisibility of the sentence.⁵ The literature highlights his debate against the *Mīmāṃsā* and *Nyāya* schools: while opponents believed meaning is built sequentially from phonemes (*varṇa*), Bhartṛhari proved that individual words and letters are pedagogical illusions. The real basis of communication is the holistic sentence-meaning (*vākya-sphoṭa*). The text distinguishes between *dhvani* (acoustic sound patterns) and *sphoṭa* (the timeless linguistic symbol). Scholars note that *dhvani* acts merely as the variable physical catalyst that manifests the immutable inner essence of the word to human senses.⁶

4. Comparative and Contemporary Relevancy

Recent comparative literature bridges ancient Indian semantics with modern Western linguistic movements. Linguists frequently draw parallels between Bhartṛhari's *sphoṭa* and Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of the signifier/signified. Furthermore, Bhartṛhari's focus on the absolute interconnectedness of language and human experience anticipated the linguistic turn in 20th-century philosophy, echoing themes found in Jacques Derrida's deconstruction and Ludwig Wittgenstein's "language games". While existing literature extensively covers either the pure grammar of *sphoṭa* or the theological implications of *Śabda-Brahman* in isolation, there is a critical shortage of comprehensive research that maps the exact metaphysical bridge between the two concepts. Your paper, *The Metaphysics of Sound*, directly addresses this gap. By explicitly detailing how the cosmic *Śabda-Brahman* manifests psychologically within human cognition as *sphoṭa*, your research synthesizes the macrocosmic creation theory with microcosmic linguistic perception into one unified framework.

¹Patnaik, T. (2007). The Metaphysics of the Word: A Study of Bhartṛhari's *śabdādvaitavāda*. *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics*, 30(1-2).

²Ritoo Kartari Antil, Vikas Singh Gautam. Bhartṛhari's linguistic philosophy: *Śabda Brahman* and the question from Ineffability. *Int J Sanskrit Res* 2022;8(2):280-283.

³Patnaik, T. (2007). *Sabda: A study of Bhartrhari's philosophy of language* (2nd ed.). D.K. Printworld.

⁴Upadhyay, P. (2024). Bhartṛhari's *sphoṭa* theory and Saussure's sign theory. *Bodhi International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Science*, 8(4), 167–172.

⁵Narayanan, S. (2012). *Vākyapadīya: Sphoṭa, jāti and dravya*. D.K. Printworld.

⁶See, <https://sreenivasaraos.com/tag/sabda-brahma/>



III. THE ONTOLOGICAL STRATA OF SPEECH (*VĀK*)

In the *Vākyapadīya*, Bhartṛhari constructs a linguistic cosmology that rejects the Western dualism between thought and language, or matter and spirit. Instead, he presents speech (*Vāk*) as a dynamic, four-tiered continuum that descends from unmanifest cosmic consciousness into audible physical sound. Language, for Bhartṛhari, is not a human invention designed to label an objective world; rather, the world is a phenomenal evolution (*vivarta*) of language itself. To anchor this metaphysical framework, Bhartṛhari establishes the foundational ontology of the Word-Absolute in the opening verse of the

Brahmakāṇḍa:

anādinidhanaṁ brahma śabdatattvaṁ yadākṣaram |
*vivartate'rthabhāvena prakriyā jagato yataḥ ||*⁷

The Brahman who is without beginning or end, whose very essence is the Word, who is cause of the manifested phonemes, who appears as the objects, from whom the creation of the world proceeds. (Translation of K A Subramania Iyer, 1965)

From this supreme source, speech differentiates into four distinct operational layers: *parā*, *paśyantī*, *madhyamā*, and *vaikharī*.

ParāVāk: The Transcendental Absolute

At its apex, speech exists as *parāvāk*, a state identical to *Śabda-Brahman*. It is entirely unmanifest (*avyakta*), eternal, and beyond any subject-object division. At this level, there is no distinction between the speaker, the word, and the entity being referred to. It represents the primordial energy of consciousness (*cit-śakti*) before the cosmic intent to express or differentiate emerges.

PaśyantīVāk: The Indivisible Vision and the locus of *Sphoṭa*

The transition into semantic intent begins at the level of *paśyantī* (literally, "the seeing one"). Here, language is experienced as an instantaneous, non-sequential intuition (*pratibhā*). Bhartṛhari utilizes a classic metaphor to describe this state: the peacock's egg (*mayūra-āṇḍa-rasa*). Just as the liquid inside a peacock's egg contains the entire, undifferentiated blueprint of the bird's future multicolored plumage, *paśyantīvāk* holds the entire meaning of a sentence as an indivisible, unified whole. This is the psychological locus of **Sphoṭa**. When a speaker conceives an idea, or a listener understands an utterance, meaning does not arrive piecemeal, syllable by syllable. Instead, it bursts forth (*sphuṭ*) as a flash of insight. At this stage, meaning is completely detached from temporal sequence or physical sound.

MadhyamāVāk: The Mental Structuring

As the unified vision of *paśyantī* begins to externalize, it passes through *madhyamā* (the intermediate or middle speech). This is the realm of pure cognitive linguistics—the internal monologue. In *madhyamā*, the mind begins to project a temporal sequence onto the unified idea. Words, noun-cases (*kāraṅgas*), verbs, and syntactic structures are organized here, yet they remain entirely internal. It is the language of thought, completely structured by grammar but not yet converted into physical air pressure.

VaikharīVāk: The Phenomenal Utterance

The final, coarsest manifestation of speech is *vaikharī*, which refers to physically articulated sound (*dhvani*). Driven by the psychic breath (*prāṇa*), air passes through the vocal organs to strike the palate, teeth, and lips, translating internal thought into a sequence of acoustic phonemes. Bhartṛhari notes an inherent tragic limitation in *vaikharī*: it forces a

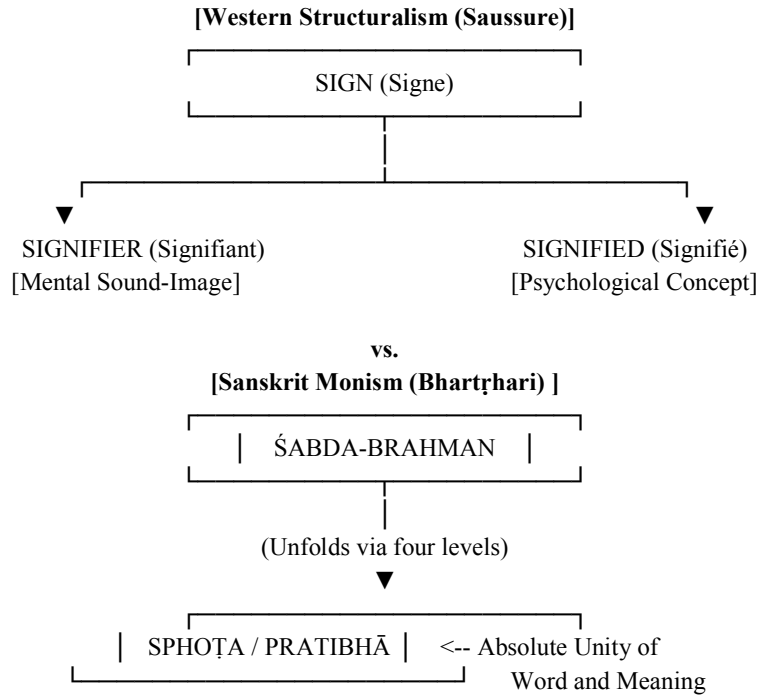
⁷Bhartṛhari, *Vākyapadīya (with the Commentary of Vṛṣabhadeva)*, ed. K. A. Subramania Iyer (Poona: Deccan College, 1966), 1.1.



holistic, timeless mental reality (*sphoṭa*) into a rigid, linear timeline. The listener must hear individual sounds in sequence (*v-a-c-a-n-a*) to trigger the sudden, simultaneous awakening of the underlying *sphoṭa* back in their own *paśyantī* layer.

IV. EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONTRAST WITH WESTERN STRUCTURALISM

To fully appreciate the radical nature of Bhartṛhari's linguistic monism, his framework must be contrasted with the binary structures of modern Western linguistics, specifically Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralism.



V. SAUSSUREAN DUALISM VS. BHARTṚHARI'S MONISM

Ferdinand de Saussure revolutionized Western thought by defining the linguistic sign as a two-sided psychological entity mapping a **Signifier** (*signifiant*, the mental sound-image) to a **Signified** (*signifié*, the concept). Crucially, Saussure asserted that the link between the two is entirely *arbitrary* and sustained only by social convention (*langue*). Bhartṛhari's *Sphoṭa* theory rejects this fundamental split. For Bhartṛhari, the word and the meaning are not two separate things glued together by human social contracts. They are two inherent, inseparable facets of the exact same underlying reality (*śabdatattva*). In the *paśyantī* state, the signifier and the signified are completely identical. The distinction between a word and its meaning only appears as an illusion during the descent into *madhyamā* and *vaikharī*. Where Saussure sees a structural duality, Bhartṛhari sees a metaphysical unity.

The Rejection of Referentialism (The Early Wittgenstein Contrast)

This also sets Bhartṛhari apart from the early "Picture Theory" of language presented by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Wittgenstein originally argued that language forms a logical "picture" of an objective, independent external world. Bhartṛhari flips this relationship entirely: the external world does not exist independently for language to copy. Rather, human cognitive perception of reality is entirely constructed, bounded, and projected by language. As Bhartṛhari famously declares:



VI. THE SOTERIOLOGICAL GOAL OF GRAMMAR

In Western academic traditions, linguistics is classified as an empirical science or a subfield of cognitive psychology. In the classical Indian tradition, however, *Vyākaraṇa* is explicitly recognized as a *Darśana*—a school of philosophy offering a systematic path to spiritual liberation (*mokṣa*). Grammar is celebrated as the highest of the Vedic auxiliary sciences (*Vedāṅgas*). Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* explicitly states that the study of correct linguistic forms (*śabda-anuśāsana*) yields spiritual merit (*dharma*). Bhartṛhari expands this into a full-fledged soteriological methodology, viewing grammar as the first step in the ladder leading to liberation.

idamādyam padasthānam siddisopānaparvaṇām /

iyam sāmokṣamāṇānāmajihmā rājapaddhatiḥ ||¹⁰

This is the first step in the ladder leading to liberation; this is the straight royal road for all those who desire salvation.
(Translation of K A Subramania Iyer, 1965)

The Path of Linguistic Ascension

The journey to liberation involves systematically tracing the four levels of speech in reverse, moving upward from physical sound back into the unmanifest Absolute:

Purification through Grammar: By studying and speaking grammatically correct words (*sādhushabda*) while avoiding corrupt forms (*asādhushabda*), the practitioner purifies their mind. This eliminates cognitive distortions at the *vaikharī* level.

Internalization of Sequence: The meditator withdraws speech from the vocal organs into the internal monologue of *madhyamā*, and then collapses the mental sequence entirely into the holistic, unified vision of *paśyantī*.

Union with the Absolute: In *paśyantī*, all illusions of internal diversity dissolve. The practitioner transcends the subject-object duality, allowing the individual soul to merge with the primordial source of all speech, *Parāvāk*, achieving final liberation (*sayujya-mokṣa*).

Bhartṛhari explicitly crowns grammar as the ultimate spiritual highway in the *Brahmakāṇḍa*:

taddvāraṇapavargasya vāṇmalānām cikitsitam |

pavitram sarvavidyānāmadhividyam prakāśate ||¹¹

It (Grammar) is the door to salvation, the remedy for all the impurities of speech, the purifier of all the sciences and shines in every branch of knowledge. (Translation of K A Subramania Iyer, 1965)

VII. THE POLEMICAL CONTEXT – THE REALIST ATOMISM OF MĪMĀṂSĀ VS. GRAMMATICAL HOLISM

To fully appreciate the radical nature of Bhartṛhari's linguistic monism, one must understand the fierce debate that shaped classical Indian philosophy of language. Bhartṛhari did not write the *Vākyapadīya* in an intellectual vacuum; rather, his framework directly challenges the dominant, pluralistic realism of the **Mīmāṃsā** (Vedic Exegesis) school, championed by thinkers like Śābara and later KumārilaBhaṭṭa. The Mīmāṃsakas were linguistic literalists. For them, the Vedas were unauthored (*apauruṣeya*), eternal, and absolutely authoritative. To preserve this eternity, they had to prove that individual words (*śabda*) and their meanings (*artha*) possess an inherent, permanent relationship. This necessity led to a highly atomistic and referential theory of language.

¹⁰ Bhartṛhari, *Vākyapadīyam*, 1.16

¹¹ Bhartṛhari, *Vākyapadīya*, 1.14.



VIII. THE MĪMĀMSĀ ATOMISM: *ABHIHITĀNVAYA-VĀDA* AND *ANVITĀBHIDHĀNA-VĀDA*

The Mīmāṃsā School viewed language from the bottom up. They argued that individual words are the primary units of meaning. When a sentence is uttered, each word independently triggers its own separate meaning in the mind of the listener. A sentence, therefore, is merely a post-facto combination or an aggregate of these independent word-meanings. This atomism split into two major sub-traditions:

Abhihitānvaya-vāda (Association of Expressed Meanings): Associated with Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, this view holds that words first express their individual, isolated meanings. Once all individual meanings are grasped, they are subsequently stitched together by the listener's mind through logical necessity (*ākāṅkṣā*), compatibility (*yogyatā*), and proximity (*sannidhi*) to form a collective sentence-meaning.

Anvitābhidhāna-vāda (Expression of Associated Meanings): Associated with Prabhākara, this view argues that words do not express isolated concepts. Instead, a word always expresses its meaning as already connected to an action or another word within a syntactic structure.

Despite their internal differences, both Mīmāṃsā camps agreed on a core premise: **the sentence is a composite entity constructed from smaller, independently real components.** Meaning is built step-by-step.

IX. BHARTṚHARI'S RADICAL REJECTION OF THE PART

Bhartṛhari completely flips this bottom-up approach. He argues that the atomistic parsing of a sentence into separate words, roots, and suffixes is a useful pedagogical fiction (*upāya*) employed by grammarians to teach language, but it does not reflect psychological or metaphysical reality. In actual human communication, individual words have no independent existence outside the sentence. Bhartṛhari presents his thesis on sentence-holism¹² (*akhaṇḍa-vākya-vāda*) in a foundational verse:

padabhede'pi varṇānāmekatvaṃ na nivartate /
vākyeṣu padamekaṃ ca bhinneṣvapyupalabhyate //
na varṇavyatirekeṇa padamanyacca vidyate /
vākyaṃ varṇapadābhyāṃ ca vyatiriktaṃ na kiñcana //
pade varṇā na vidyante varṇeṣvavayavā na ca /
*vākyaūt padānāmatyantāṃ praviveko na kaścana //*¹³

Even when the words where they occur are different, the identity of the phonemes is not affected. Similarly, a word occurring in deferent sentences is one and the same. There is no word over and above the phonemes nor is there any sentence over and above the phonemes and words. There are no phonemes in the word nor are there parts in the phoneme. There is no absolute difference of the words from the sentence.

(Translation of K A Subramania Iyer, 1965)

To illustrate this, Bhartṛhari challenges the realist view of perception. If you look at a painting of a picture, you do not perceive a collection of blue, green, and red paint strokes and then manually compute them into a landscape. You perceive the painting as a singular, unified visual experience. The individual brushstrokes are real only to the art technician, not to the viewer experiencing the art. Similarly, separate words exist only for the linguistic technician (the grammarian). For the actual speaker and listener, language is a seamless, indivisible flow of meaning. By exposing the flaws of Mīmāṃsā atomism, Bhartṛhari sets the stage for his doctrine of *Sphoṭa*: meaning is not an additive mathematical equation, but an organic, indivisible absolute.

¹² Perrett, R. W. (2023). The unreality of words. *Synthese*, 201(1), 15.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-022-03904-7>

¹³ Bhartṛhari, *Vākya-padīya*, 1.71-73



X. SPHOṬA AND DHVANI THROUGH A SAUSSUREAN LENS – LANGUE VERSUS PAROLE

To fully contextualize Bhartṛhari's internalist semantics within modern linguistic discourse, his division of language must be map-linked to Ferdinand de Saussure's foundational dualism of *langue* and *parole*. Writing nearly fifteen centuries after Bhartṛhari, Saussure revolutionized Western structural linguistics by splitting language into two distinct dimensions: *langue*, the abstract, systematic, and socially shared code of language rules; and *parole*, the individual, concrete executive acts of speaking in real-time.¹⁴

XI. THE FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENCE: SPHOṬA AS LANGUE AND DHVANI AS PAROLE

A striking conceptual parallel exists between this Western binary and Bhartṛhari's distinction between *Sphoṭa* (the invariant linguistic unit) and *Dhvani* (the manifested acoustic sound). For Bhartṛhari, *Sphoṭa* is the true language principle—the permanent, indivisible mental template of a word or sentence that resides in the consciousness of both the speaker and listener.¹⁵ It is entirely free from temporal sequence, pitch variation, or physical defects of speech. Conversely, *Dhvani* represents the physical production of speech. When an individual speaks, they employ their vocal organs to produce acoustic waves that travel through space. This is an exact analogue to Saussure's *parole*. Just as Saussure notes that *parole* is variable, fleeting, and highly dependent on individual execution, Bhartṛhari demonstrates that *Dhvani* is subject to time, accent, speed (*vṛtti* whether spoken fast, medium, or slow), and individual phonetic errors.¹⁶ Crucially, both thinkers realize that without the abstract, stable system (*langue* / *Sphoṭa*), the physical acts of speech (*parole* / *Dhvani*) would be nothing more than meaningless noise. The individual acoustic instances are merely vehicles meant to trigger or activate the pre-existing, structured mental system.

XII. THE ONTOLOGICAL DEPARTURE: STRUCTURAL ARBITRARINESS VS. COSMIC NECESSITY

Despite this structural symmetry, Bhartṛhari and Saussure part ways on a fundamental ontological level. This divergence highlights why Bhartṛhari's model is an important contribution to the philosophy of mind and language:

The Nature of the Sign: For Saussure, *langue* is entirely a psychological and social phenomenon. The linguistic sign is born out of a collective contract within a community, and the link between the signifier (sound-image) and the signified (concept) is completely **arbitrary** (*arbitraire*).¹⁷ There is no internal, cosmic reason why the letters c-o-w represent a four-legged animal; it is merely social convention.

The Identity of Reality: Bhartṛhari vehemently rejects the idea that language is a mere human artifact or an arbitrary social contract. For him, the relationship between *śabda* (word) and *artha* (meaning) is eternal (*nitya*) and built into the cosmos.¹⁸ *Sphoṭa* is not just a psychological filing cabinet built by social conditioning; it is an evolutionary projection of *Śabda-Brahman*.

Furthermore, where Saussure's *langue* serves purely as an imminent network of differences where terms are defined only by what they are *not*, Bhartṛhari's *Sphoṭa* is a positive, self-contained semantic absolute.¹⁹ For Saussure, language is

¹⁴Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 9–14.

¹⁵Harold G. Coward, "Bhartṛhari and Saussure," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 4, no. 3/4 (1976): 218.

¹⁶Bimal Krishna Matilal, *The Word and the World: India's Contribution to the Study of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 84–85.

¹⁷Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 67–69.

¹⁸K. A. SubramaniaIyer, *Bhartṛhari: A Study of the Vākyapadīya in the Light of the Ancient Commentaries* (Poona: Deccan College, 1969), 98–101.

¹⁹Coward, "Bhartṛhari and Saussure," 222.



a closed system that separates humans from a direct experience of the world. For Bhartṛhari, language is the absolute consciousness that constitutes both human cognition and the material world.

By upgrading Saussure's psychological structuralism into a full-scale metaphysical framework, Bhartṛhari avoids the trap of complete linguistic skepticism. He presents language not as an artificial cage that distorts our view of reality, but as the cosmic compass that directly leads back to it.

XIII. THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF *PRATIBHĀ* – FROM SENTENCE COMPREHENSION TO INSTINCTIVE COGNITION

To understand how *Sphoṭa* operates dynamically within consciousness, one must analyze Bhartṛhari's unique epistemological concept of *Pratibhā*. Often translated into Western academic vernacular as "intuition," "insight," or "a flash of creative genius," *Pratibhā* is defined by Bhartṛhari as the immediate, non-discursive grasp of a sentence's meaning. It is the exact moment the listener transitions from hearing a fragmented stream of sequential sounds (*dhvani*) to experiencing a flash of holistic semantic comprehension. Bhartṛhari asserts that *Pratibhā* is completely unanalyzable into smaller component parts. When asked to define it, a listener cannot easily describe *how* they understood a sentence; they simply know that the meaning has dawned upon them.

XIV. THE UNIVERSALITY OF *PRATIBHĀ*: LANGUAGE AS BIOLOGICAL INSTINCT

Crucially, Bhartṛhari does not limit *Pratibhā* to human intellectual discourse or formal grammatical decoding. In the *Vākyapadīya*, he expands the scope of *Pratibhā* into a universal cosmic force that drives the behavior of all living beings. He argues that what humans call "intellectual intuition" is fundamentally the exact same underlying power that manifests as "instinct" in the animal kingdom. To substantiate this claim, Bhartṛhari points to the spontaneous behaviors of animals, which occur without any formal training, social conditioning, or logical deduction:

svara-vṛttim vikurutam adhaupumskokilasyakah |
*jantūnām jātijam lekham kanyādeḥ kaḥ prabodhakah ||*²⁰

"Who alters or tunes the voice of the male cuckoo in spring? Who prompts animals to activities like building nests or digging holes, which are inherent to their species?"²¹

Bhartṛhari argues that a newborn animal does not need to learn a language or analyze logical propositions to survive. A spider spinning an intricate web, a bird constructing a nest, or a newborn calf instantly seeking its mother's udder are all actions driven by *Pratibhā*. This spontaneous knowledge is born with the creature (*jātijam*).

XV. THE COGNITIVE IMPLICATION: LANGUAGE AS THE MATRIX OF MIND

This biological extension of *Pratibhā* carries profound implications for contemporary cognitive science and universal grammar. For Bhartṛhari, instinct is not a non-linguistic, purely physical mechanical reaction. Rather, instinct is *Śabda* (the language principle) operating silently, deeply, and structurally within the subconscious mind. Because the entire universe is a manifestation of the Word-Absolute (*Śabda-Brahman*), every consciousness whether human, animal, or avian is fundamentally structured by language at its deeper *paśyantī* layer. Human speech is simply an explicit, vocalized peak of an internal, subconscious linguistic matrix that guides all life forms.

By defining *Pratibhā* as an all-encompassing biological and semantic compass, Bhartṛhari challenges modern Western Cartesian splits that separate "rational human language" from "blind animal mechanism". He presents a unified

²⁰Bhartṛhari, *Vākyapadīya (with the Commentary of Vṛṣabhadeva)*, ed. K. A. SubramaniaIyer (Poona: Deccan College, 1966), 2.147–2.149.

²¹K. A. SubramaniaIyer, *Bhartṛhari: A Study of the Vākyapadīya in the Light of the Ancient Commentaries* (Poona: Deccan College, 1969), 88–92.



cognitive architecture where syntax, semantics, intuition, and survival instinct are all brilliant, multi-colored feathers emerging from the exact same cosmic egg.

XVI. CONCLUSION

Bhartrhari's *Vākyapadīya* presents a profound linguistic model that radically expands the boundaries of both philosophy and grammar. By weaving together the structural precision of Pāṇini with deep monistic metaphysics, he constructs an architecture where language is neither an arbitrary social contract nor a passive mirror of physical matter. Instead, language is recognized as the foundational matrix of all human experience, cognition, and cosmic evolution. His theories of *Sphoṭa* and *Pratibhā* offer compelling, highly relevant alternatives to Western paradigms, challenging Saussurean structuralism and early referential models. Ultimately, Bhartrhari reminds us that language is not merely a tool for transactional communication. In its purest, most highly disciplined form, grammar serves as a rigorous ontological science a direct path to unlocking the supreme consciousness of *Śabda-Brahman*.

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