

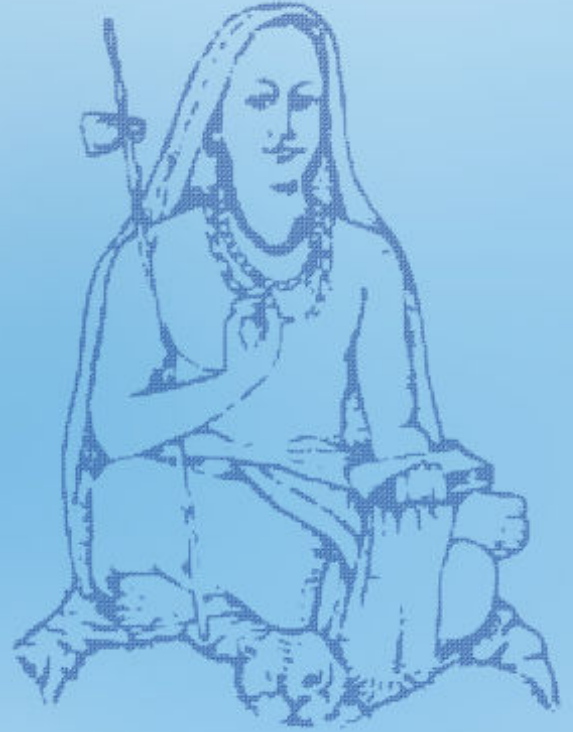
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# **KIRANĀVALĪ**

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# The Concept of *Pratibhā* and its Implications; Gleanings from *Vākyapadīya*

Dr. Sarath P Nath<sup>1</sup>

## *Abstract*

The concept of Sentence and Sentence-meaning is discussed in manifold ways by the preceptors of different Indian Schools of thought. Almost all of them have given primacy to the process of understanding the sentence-meaning, which is known as 'śābdabodha'. Bhartṛhari tries to converge different ideas on the concept of sentence-meaning into six views. In his *Vākyapadīya*, he introduces the theory of *Pratibhā*, which states that the sentence conveys its meaning in a flash. Bhartṛhari expounds the important characteristics of *Pratibhā* in several verses. This article tries to unravel the psychological as well as the philosophical outlook of *Pratibhā*.

## *Keywords*

Sentence, Sentence-meaning, *Pratibhā*, *Vāk*, *Sphoṭa* and Sentence Indivisibility.

## *Introduction*

Language is generally perceived as the method of communication. It is essentially a social phenomenon, through which, we share our thoughts, experiences, emotions, commands, wishes, statements of facts etc. Thus, the basic function of language is 'communication'. Ancient scholars in India inquired into this concept and went beyond its mere communicative perspective. They portrayed it as the lamp that brought to light all the material objects. Language which thus spreads over all walks of life is not just a medium of communication, based on syllable-word-sentence. Language can be perceived as the carrier of thoughts and ideas. Thus, beyond its communicative level, language is something which carries within itself the entire culture of

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a community. Therefore, an insight into the working of language can be the beginning of the philosophical inquiry. Thus, Language can be analysed in communicative and philosophical levels.

### **The Concept of Sentence and Sentence-meaning**

When it is perceived as one of the methods of communicating one's thoughts, the basic unit of Language is Sentence. An idea or a thought can never be in bits and pieces, but is a unitary whole. Thus, it is communicated also as a unitary whole, but not in terms of its parts. Since words cannot communicate the speaker's thoughts fully, a sentence is to be considered as the unit of language, which can communicate the whole idea. Different thinkers accept either a letter or a word or a sentence as the unit of language. But all of them emphasise the role of sentences in communicating the ideas conceived by the speaker. Therefore the study of sentence and sentence-meaning became the most important concept for linguists, grammarians and philosophers. In ancient Indian Schools of thought, Bhartṛhari, in his magnum opus 'Vākyapadīya' (hereafter VP), elaborately discusses the philosophy of language and its units such as Word and Sentence and their meanings.

The concept of sentence is defined in manifold ways by the preceptors of different schools of thought. In general, the sentence is defined in two perspectives; Sakhaṇḍa and Akhaṇḍa. The former school treats sentences as a collection of semantically connected words. On the other side, a group of philosophers hold that sentence is an indivisible unit of language (Eko' navayavaḥ śabdaḥ), devoid of any parts. This is the Akhaṇḍa School of sentence. Bhartṛhari emphasises on the Akhaṇḍa School of sentence, which holds the indivisibility of the sentence and the sentence-meaning. Bhartṛhari termed this all-inclusive and indivisible sentence-meaning as Pratibhā.

### **The Concept of *Pratibhā*; Perspectives of Bhartṛhari**

Bhartṛhari introduces the concept of *Pratibhā* in the following verse.

vicchedagrahaṇē'rthānām pratibhānyaiva jāyate

vākyārtha iti tāmāhuḥ padārthairupapādītām (VP, 2.143)

When the meanings of the individual words in a sentence have been understood separately, a flash of understanding takes place.

This is the meaning of the sentence, brought about by the meanings of the individual words. In the School of Sentence-Indivisibility, though individual words and their meanings are considered unreal, they serve the purpose of bringing the sentence-meaning to the mind. In other words, they manifest the sentence-meaning. The listener receives the uttered sounds in a sequential manner and hence the meanings of the parts of a sentence may be perceived in the listener's mind. But as soon as a sentence, the complete linguistic unit, is perceived, a sudden flash of understanding takes place. This flash of understanding is termed as '*Pratibhā*'. The whole semantic exposition of Bhartṛhari has been developed on this unique as well as original concept.

### ***Pratibhā* and its Implications**

#### ***Pratibhā* and Vāk**

The whole second canto of VP highlights the semantic nature of *Pratibhā*, which has been discussed in detail. But Bhartṛhari treated the concept beyond its linguistic characteristics. He revealed the philosophic as well as psychological outlook of this concept. Bhartṛhari explains the process of cognising the meaning in a language act in two perspectives. He analyses the speech act both from the points of view of the speaker and the hearer. To him, a linguistic communication can be said to be complete when the speaker expresses his intention through sounds and the hearer understands what the speaker intends to mean. In this context, what K A S Iyer remarks, is relevant. He puts forth the view that Bhartṛhari perceives *Pratibhā* from two different dimensions i.e. from the point of view of the speaker's experience before utterance and that of the hearer's experience after hearing the utterance. When *Pratibhā* is analysed from the hearer's point of view, it is a linguistic entity, which gives rise to the cognition of the sentence-meaning. *Pratibhā* transforms the sentence heard into meaning. This explains the semantic feature of *Pratibhā*, where the sentence-meaning shines forth as a flash. When it is analysed from the speaker's angle, *Pratibhā* precedes the utterance. Here, *Pratibhā* is not conceived in the form of any language and thus the units of language, either in the form of sentence or words are not important. Coward identifies this state of *Pratibhā* with the Paśyantī stage of *Vāk*, after which comes

the utterance (1980, p.14-15). The *Vṛtti* also points to this aspect of *Pratibhā* (VP, 1.14).

According to Bhartṛhari the speech principle *Vāk* has three stages in the course of its manifestation viz. *paśyantī*, *madhyamā* and *vaikharī* (VP, 1.144, citation). Later grammarians like Nāgeśa and Kaundabhaṭṭa adds another division known as *parā* to this list. This fourfold classification of speech principle is developed in *Tantraśāstra* and the *Pratyabhijñā* School of philosophy. According to Bhartṛhari *parā* and *paśyantī* are identical. Gaurinath Sastri argues that Bhartṛhari accepts no stage higher than *paśyantī* (See Gowrinath Sastri, 1959, chs.1-4). Among these three stages, *Vaikharī* form of speech is the first level of speech act, which is called as *dhvani*. This is the physical sound that which is really heard by the sense of hearing and can be differentiated as phonemes, words and sentences. This word is sequential in nature and all the peculiarities of speaker are also present in this state. As the name indicates, *madhyamā* form of speech is an 'intermediate' as it lies in between *vaikharī* and *paśyantī*. The language and the thought conveyed by it are undifferentiated in this state. Bhartṛhari says that it is located in the *buddhi* and is accompanied by *prāṇa* (breath). Thus it is psychological in its nature and can be comprehended by the intellect (VP, 1.144). This corresponds to *Prākṛtadhvani* described in the first chapter of VP. The third and supreme stage *paśyantī* is the śabdabrahman, which is explicated in the opening verse of VP. This purest as well as subtlest form of śabda is abstract in nature and has no sequence. It is indivisible and beyond worldly use. This has been identified with *Pratibhā*, the flash of insight. Vṛṣabhadeva expounds this form of *Vāk* in his *Paddhati*, an ancient commentary of VP as:- comm. on VP, 1.14 reads as follows. "*Pratibhām iti - yeyaṃ samastaśabdārthakāraṇabhūtā buddiḥ, yaṃ paśyantīyāhuḥ, yataḥ śabdāḥ prāṇavṛttim anupatanti, tam anuparā iti anugacchati*" (VP, 1.14). If one tempts to realise this stage of speech, he passes through various stages and ultimately arrives at an undifferentiated state known as *Pratibhā*. In this regard Kunjunni Raja observes that "the complete utterance or the *vākyasphoṭa* indicates this principle of consciousness, *paśyantī* or *Pratibhā*. There is no real distinction between speech and thought at this stage (1963, p.147-148).



### ***Pratibhā and the Sentence Sphoṭa***

As discussed, Bh's whole theory of language act is firmly rooted in three basic concepts of language, namely dhvani, sphoṭa and Pratibhā. These are three different levels of language, which are interconnected to complete a language act. Among the definitions of sentence mentioned in VP, Bhartṛhari gives emphasis to the definitions held by those, who believe in the indivisibility theory of the sentence. In their perspective, sentence is defined as sentence-sphoṭa and sentence-meaning is Pratibhā. Thus it is clear that sentence-sphoṭa and sentence-meaning Pratibhā are two distinct concepts coined by Bhartṛhari. Sphoṭa can be taken as an auditory impression manifested by articulated sounds or dhvani whereas Pratibhā refers to the meaning conveyed by the sentence. Meaning is understood only after the auditory perception of sound. Thus Pratibhā is aroused only after the sphoṭa is manifested.

Different opinions are held by scholars in this regard. Scholars like J. Brough, Kunjunn Raja and KAS Iyer argue that sphoṭa is the linguistic sign in its aspect of meaning-bearer. According to them, sphoṭa is not a mystic entity as suggested by A B Keith (1928, p.387), but they consider the sphoṭa doctrine as the theory of language-symbolism. This concept of sphoṭa explains the problem of how language is grasped in a verbal communication. But the problem of the meaning of the sentence is yet to be unravelled. They maintain that sphoṭa in general and sentence-sphoṭa in particular has been assumed as a solution to this problem. On the contrary they opine that Pratibhā as a flash of understanding is the sentence-meaning. These two arguments are self-contradictory. Here what Matilal remarks, seems to be more agreeable. To quote him -

For Bhartṛhari however, this is a wrong term: 'meaning-bearing unit'. *Sphoṭa* is the real substratum, proper linguistic unit, which is identical also with its meaning. Language is not the vehicle of meaning or the conveyor-belt of thought. Thought anchors language and language anchors thought. śabdānā or 'languageing', is thinking; and thought vibrates through language. In this way of looking at things, there cannot be any essential difference between a linguistic unit and its meaning or the thought it conveys. *Sphoṭa* refers to this non differentiated language-principle. Thus, I believe that it is sometimes even incorrect to ask whether *sphoṭa* is or is not

the meaning-bearing speech unit in Bh's system (1992, p.85).

If the *sphoṭa* theory arose as a solution to the problem of understanding language, Bhartṛhari would not have introduced the concept of *Pratibhā* as sentence-meaning. Thus, it can be comprehended that Bhartṛhari puts forth the concept of sentence-*sphoṭa*, to explain the language principle so as to how language is used and grasped. On the other hand, the concept of *Pratibhā* is introduced to solve the problem of how language is understood (Gayatri Rath, 2000, p.164-165). The auditory impressions are transformed into meaning in the mind by the virtue of *Pratibhā*.

### ***Pratibhā and the Concept of Transformations in Modern Linguistics***

Recent researches in the field of syntax and semantics have presented various theories regarding the analysis of sentences. The psycholinguistic approaches of transformational linguistics<sup>2</sup> revolutionised the scientific study of sentences and its meaning. The two major prospects of transformational grammar are 'linguistic competency' and 'generative grammar'. These two concepts are developed by the later cognitive linguists such as Noam Chomsky (Syntactic Structures), Ronald Langacker (Foundations of Cognitive Grammar) etc. In contrast with the structuralists, transformational linguists believe that the proper object of linguistic study is the knowledge that the native speaker possesses, which enables them to

2 The linguist's approach towards the analysis of a sentence is mainly of four types: Traditional, Comparative and Historical, Structural and Descriptive and Transformational. The traditional grammarians break up the word order to analyse the relationship between the words such as nouns and adjectives. On the other side, linguists like Otto Jespersen tried to analyse language in a historical and comparative methodology. They hold that language undergoes constant change and thus the prototypes can be traced through the historical and comparative analysis. As scholars focused more on language and less on history, they introduced a new methodology in analysing language. These scholars approach language in two ways; Synchronic and Diachronic, which focus on the structural analysis of language. This methodology has been developed by a group of linguists called structuralists. The goals, methods and assumptions of transformational grammarians are unique and different from those of descriptive linguistics. In contrast with the structuralists, they consider grammar to be a system of rules that generate exactly those combinations of words which form grammatical sentences in a given language. They developed the concept of 'transformations' which helps the user to produce new sentences from the existing ones.

produce and understand various sentences. This knowledge is termed as 'competence'. According to Chomsky, this is innate and he called it 'innate linguistic knowledge' or 'innate language competency'. The concept of generative grammar tries to define rules that can generate the infinite number of grammatical sentences possible in a language. This method of grammar uses the concept of 'transformations' which helps people to produce new sentences from the existing ones. To explain this concept, Chomsky sets forth the idea that each sentence in a language has two levels of representation; a deep structure and a surface structure. The deep structure represents the core semantic relations of a sentence and is mapped on to the surface structure via transformations. Thus deep structures can be perceived as a universal grammar underlying the language act and corresponding to the linguistic competence.

On a shrewd analysis of the concept of *Pratibhā*, conceived by Bhartṛhari it can be stated that *Pratibhā* is the prototype of 'transformations'. In a conversation, the listener first grasps the speech in terms of words, one after the other. This manifests the internal *sphoṭa* (*buddhisthaśabda*), which is the auditory impression of the uttered speech. At this level it resembles the concept of 'deep structure' presented by the transformationalists. Sudden after the manifestation of the internal *sphoṭa*, *Pratibhā*, the intuitive instinct transforms it into the meaning. Similar process is adopted by the cognitive linguists, when they explain that the deep structure is mapped onto the surface structure via transformations.

It has been a topic of debate among linguists as well as psychologists about how a child acquires its first language. Some of them accept the role of instinct as not so useful in the child's language acquisition, while some others hold the view that a child's language is a product of instinct (Gayatri Rath, 2000, p.151-152). Chomsky answers this vexed problem by his notions of generative grammar and innate linguistic knowledge. In his cognitive theory, Chomsky suggests that language acquisition is based on various rules and regulations. A child, who comes in contact with various language features, makes his own rules though unconsciously. Earlier it was believed that the children grasp their preliminary words from either the parents or the other elders.

But recent linguistic trends do not accept that parents ‘teach’ children their first language. The reason is no parent has the necessary explicit knowledge to do so, and children anyway acquire the knowledge of their first language long before they are in a position to understand the relevant instructions of their parents (Neil Smith, 2004, p.116). In his theory of ‘cognitive capability’, Chomsky argues that people possess a kind of language faculty which is a part of human natural biological qualities. This idea is known as ‘Innate language faculty’, which has a basic grammar system which is termed as ‘Universal Grammar’ (Jyothirmayi P C, 2009, p.283). This innate linguistic knowledge enables a child to acquire the notion of structure, which helps the child to learn any language.

Bharṭṛhari also holds a similar view with Chomsky and he emphasises on the role of intuition in child’s language acquisition. He opines that it is śabdabhāvanā that enables a new born baby to make the first movements of vocal organs. Stimulated by this śabdabhāvanā, air coming out of the baby’s mouth is able to strike at certain points of articulation and produce sounds. The *Vṛtti* again mentions that there is no other reasons than *Pratibhā* to make these movements

ādyaḥ karaṇavinyāsaḥ prāṇasyordhnaṃ samīraṇam  
sthānānāmabhighātaśca na vinā śabdabhāvanām. (VP, 1.122)

This theory of word impregnated-ness of Bharṭṛhari akin to the innate language competency of the transformationalists. Even though Chomsky’s concepts of language are different from that of Bharṭṛhari there are resemblances between *Pratibhā* and Chomsky’s ‘Innate Language Faculty’. Both are innate and instinctive in nature and explain the process through which children gain the knowledge of language.

In Indian scenario, *Mīmāṃsakas* and *Naiyāyikas* also present a similar concept in the child’s language acquisition, with slight changes. They also state that children first understand the sentence as a whole and later, by the process of inclusion and exclusion (*āvāpa* and *udvāpa*), they come to know about the individual meanings of the words. Later they are able to understand and produce new sentences. The process is elaborated in *Nyāyasiddhāntamuktāvalī* as:-

*evamvyavahārādapiyathāprayojakavṛddhena ghaṭamānayetuyuktaṃ*

*tacchrutvā prayojyavṛddhena ghaṭa ānīstastadavadhārya pārsvastho bālo ghaṭānayanarūpakāryaṃ ghaṭamānayeti śabdaprayojyamitya vadharayati. tataśca ghaṭaṃ naya gāṃ badhānetyādivākyaḍ āvāpodvāpābhyāṃ ghaṭādīpadānāṃ kāryānvitaghaṭādaḡ śaktiṃ gṛhṇāti. ----- prathamataḡ kāryānvitaghaṭādaḡ śaktyavadhāraṇe' pi lāghavena paścāttasya parityāgaucityāt. (1988, p.561-563)*

## Conclusion

The sum total of this discussion is that Bhartṛhari can be considered the first to introduce the instinctive innate knowledge of a person called *Pratibhā* into the realm of linguistics. This innate capacity enables a person to understand and produce various sentences and is manifested by the indivisible-sentence-*sphoṭa*. The concept of transformations introduced by the modern cognitive linguists akin to Bh's *Pratibhā* in several aspects.

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