

ISSN : 2395-4132

# THE EXPRESSION

An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

**Bimonthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal**



Impact Factor 3.9

**Vol. 5 Issue 6 December 2019**

Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh

Email : [editor@expressionjournal.com](mailto:editor@expressionjournal.com)

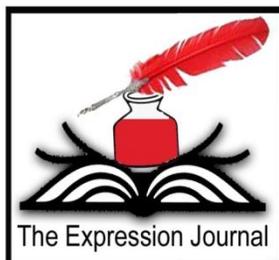
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# The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 3.9)

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ISSN: 2395-4132



## **METAPHYSICAL BASIS OF SPEECH AND *SPHOTA* IN INDIAN LINGUISTIC TRENDS**

**DR. PRATYAKSHA RAJ**

**Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy**

**Ramesh Jha Mahila College, Saharsa (Bihar)**

**A Constituent Unit of B.N. Mandal University, Madhepura, Bihar**

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### **Abstract**

Language is supposed to be very common and essential part of human life. It has been discussed and interpreted from various angles understanding its mysterious nature. The mystery of language/human speech has fascinated the attention of philosophers stimulating their thinking from very early times. The Vedas and Upanisads are emphatically dealt with intuitive flashes about the nature of *Vak'-Eternal Verbum'*. The word is considered as a creative principle of the world and is accorded a divine status - *Sabda Brahman*. This defecation of word can remind one of the Biblical saying - "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God." This idea has a striking parallel in the *'Taittiriya Brahman'*- "*Sah Bhuhiti Vyaharat Sah Bhumim asrjat*, i.e. He spoke 'Earth' and the Earth came into being. The analysis of language in Indian thought has flown into different channels in divergent directions. Multifarious questions have been raised about the different aspects of language and its parts. As for example - How does the transcendental eternal *sphota* or word essence pass from its nominal stage to the phenomenal phases, or in other words to the empirical words that are spoken and heard. One must understand these first in order to unfold the vast Indian linguistic trends. It is all due to the rigorous hard work of ancient scholars that Indian linguistic philosophy has succeeded today providing knowledge of the universal tool of expression and meaning. The researcher aims to explore 'Metaphysical Basis of Speech and Sphota in Indian Linguistic Trends'.

### **Keywords**

Sabda-Brahman, Language, Taittiriya Brahaman, Vak, Sphota,  
Linguistic Philosophy, Speech, Sphota.

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The secret of language or human speech attracted the attention and stimulated the thinking of our philosophers from very early times. The *Vedas* and *Upanishads* are fully of intuitive flashes about the nature of *Vak'-Eternal Verbum'*. The word was regarded as the creative principle of the world and was accorded a divine status - *Sabda Brahman*. This defecation of Word can remind one of the Biblical saying, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God." This idea has a striking parallel in the '*Taittiriya Brahman*' — "*Sah Bhuhiti Vyaharat Sah Bhumim asrjat*, i.e. He spoke 'Earth' and the Earth came into being.

The analysis of language in Indian thought has flown into different channels in divergent directions. Multifarious questions have been raised about the different aspects of language and its parts. As for example – How does the transcendental eternal *sphota* or word essence pass from its nominal stage to the phenomenal phases, or in other words to the empirical words that are spoken and heard ?

According to the Grammarian Philosophers the audible sound which is pronounced by the vocal organs is only the outer expression of the inner force that ties deep-rooted in reality. Speech may be compared to an iceberg which is more submerged under the surface and is perceptible only so far as its outer part is concerned. It is manifested through the vocal organs (*Vagindriyas*) which are seated in the heart, throat, head, root of the tongue, teeth, nose, lips and the palate.

Thus, there are four levels of speech ranging from the transcendent to the manifest stage: -

1. *Para Vak* (Transcendent speech)
2. *Pasyanti* (Subtle speech)
3. *Madhyama* (Inner speech)
4. *Vaikhari* (Manifest speech)

1. *Para Vak* or Transcendent speech is the deepest and subtlest form of speech. It is located in the '*muladhara cakra*', below the genitals and it is beyond experience. Para is motionless (*nishspanda*) state of undifferentiated '*sabda*' which is devoid of any such particulars as letters (*Varna-divise-sarahita*).

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ISSN: 2395-4132

2. *Pasyanti* or Subtle speech –It is assessable to the *yogins* by means of supernatural or supernormal perception. *Pssyanti* is the subtle state of *sabda* in vibration (*spanda*) accessible only to extraordinary perception. It is located in the ‘*Svadhithana Cakra*’ in the navel region.

3. *Mandhyama* or Inner speech – It is the internal level of speech just below *vaikhari*. It originates in the heart and it is inaudible to others. It is located in the *Anahata Cakra*’ in the heart. *Madhyama* is that inner state of silent speech which is ideational and associated with intellect (*buddhi*).

4. *Vaikhari* or Manifest speech – The external form (*bahya-rupa*) of speech which becomes audible (*srotra grahya*) is khown as *Vaikhari*. *Vaikhari* is the gross word (*Stula saba*) which refers to the gross object (*sthula artha*). It is located in the ‘*Visuddha Cakra*’ in throat.

The ‘*para-vak*’ which is the underlying root of speech is sleeted in the region below the genital, *pasyanti*’ is located in the naval, ‘*madhyama*’ is located in the heart, and *vaikhari* is located in the throat. While the first three are subvocal, it is the fourth, the *vaikhari* that is the speech in its vocal stage, that is called language.

The two-fold aspects ‘*nama*; and ‘*rupa*’ functions simultaneously as ‘*sabda*’ (word) and ‘*astha*’ (meaning). But they are in the form of empirical mental impression (*samskara*) and sere both as ‘cogniser’ (*grahaka*) and ‘cognised’ (*grahya*).

The roots of speech referred to above can be understood by hamming a knowledge of the sixfold *cakaras* or the centers of energy. They are: -

- i) *Muladhara cakra*
- ii) *Manipura Cakra*
- iii) *Swadhithana Cakra*
- iv) *Anahath Cakra*
- v) *Visuddha Cakra*
- vi) *Ajna Cakra*.

These centers are located respectively in the root of the Genital, heart, throat, middle of the eye brows and cerebral artifices. This is known as the serpentine energy of the mysterious powers of the kundalini shakti.

*Muladhara cakra* is the special center of the sacro-coccygeal region the region below the genitals. It is in this region that the mysterious kundalini the coiled serpentine energy lies and it is the seat of *Para Vak*.

*Svadhithana Cakra* is the special entre in the region of the naval. It is the seat of *pasyativak*.

*Anahata cakra* is the special center in the region of the heart. It is the seat of *madhyama Vak*.

*Visuddha cakra* is the special center in the region of the throat. It is seat of *Vakhari Vak*.

All these centers of energy are located in the different parts of the vertebral column or the spinal cord.

It is through the *susumna nadi* that the vital air (*prana-vayu*) passes to the cakras. It is in the interior of the cerebo-special ascis and extents from the basic plexus (*muladhara*) to the *saharsara cakra* (in the vertical region). It is most closely associated with speech (*vak*). Thus the sound that is uttered as a letter (*varna*) is the result of a long-drawn process originating in the

*muladhara* and gradually to *visuddha cakra* by the force of air till it assumes the stage of *vaikhari* or articulate sound (*varna*).

All these fourfold stages of *para*, *pasyanti*, *madhyama* and *vaikhari*, can be traced in the *Rigveda*, which says- "While the former three are hidden into the caw, the fourth is spoken by men.

## Re-Evaluating the Concept of Sphotavada in Indian Linguistic Trends

The word '*sphota*' is etymologically derived from the word '*sphut*' which means to open, to unfold, and to develop. The theory of '*sphota*' has been propounded mainly by the grammatical school of Philosophy (*Vyakarana Darshan*). The origin of the concept of the *sphota* is attributed to one *Sphotayana Rsi*, who has been referred to by Panini in his *sutra* (*ayan – sphotayansya*) & by Nagesha Bhatta in his '*Sphotavada*'.

It is interpreted in various ways

- such as that which develops by itself (*sphutate -sphutibhavati- iti – sphotah*)
- Or that which is revealed by letters (*sphutyate-vyajyate- varnah iti sphotah*)
- Or that by which a sense is revealed (*sphutati- artah -asmat iti sphotah*)

In the first sense it is equated with Brahman which is self-unfolding principle. But the *sphota* is not always used in this metaphysical sense. In the linguistic context, it is used in the second and third sense.

The *Vaiyakarana* describes *sphota* as that eternal word – symbol (*nitya – sabda*) which has the following characters: -

1. *Sphota* is different from letters (*Varnantirikta*)
2. Manifestable by letters (*Varna – abhivyanga*)
3. Indicative of meaning (*artha – pratyayaka*)

In this way according to *Vaiyakaran darshan* *sphota* is defined as *varna-tirikatah, varna bhivyangyah arthapratyayakah nitya – sabda*.

### Nature of Sphota:

1. *Sphota* is ultimately one whole that is indivisible (*akhanda*). The letters and words, are only necessary for the revelation of meaning (*sphotavyanjana*), because as one part less whole (*niramsa-sphota*)
2. This implies *sphota* is one and it is manifested through different letters and words and the distinction between letters and words are recognized for practical purpose.
3. *Sphota* is independent of time (*kala-nerpeksha*). It does not depend on time and the variation of mode (*vrtti bheda*) are merely projected (*aropita*) on *sabda* or *sphota*.
4. The *sphota* is essentially part less (*niramsa*). But it cannot be grasped without the help of parts. These parts such as *varna & padas* are abstractions from the ultimate stand point.
5. The *varnas and padas* are helpful in the cognition of the *sphota*, which is really indivisible (*akhanda*) and eternal (*nitya*). The apparent multiplicity in unity is an illusion like the color – illusion of a jaundiced man or like the delusion of a running mountain from a fast-moving carriage.
6. The sounds vary in their mode (*vrtti*) due to loud or feeble voice etc. But the essence or meaning (*sphota – tattva*) remains unhampered.

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ISSN: 2395-4132

7. The *sphota* is revealed by the sound (*dhvani*) just as the same face is reflected in various ways in jewels or swords etc, so the same *sphota* appears variously in different sounds.
8. The gradual manifestation of the *sphota* is revealed gradually by the sequence of the pronounced letters in a sentence just as the milk gradually turns into curd and seed gradually assumes the shape of a tree so the manifestation of the meaning (*sphota*) is apprehended gradually in successive order.
9. It is not the *sphota* but the manifestation of it (*sphota-vyanjna*) that takes place successively from letters to words and through words to the sentence.
10. Just as a verse or an incantation (*mantra*) becomes more intelligible by repeated readings similarly the *sphota* becomes clearer by repeated sound. Different sound produced at different times and places reveal the same object (*sphota*).

It is really hard to limit the vast nature and characters of *sphota* in words as it is beginningless and endless and eternal.

## Function of *Sphota*:

The function of *sphota* is the revelation of meaning of the sense (*sphota*). The sense is revealed by the sound (*dhvani*). *Dhvani* is of two kinds *prakta* & *vaikrta*. *Prakta dhvani* is constant and it is the real cause of the cognition of *sphota*, word. The *vaikrta* reveals the (*sphota*) sense just as the mirror reflects the face. The two may be regarded as *pratibimba* and *bimba* respectively.

Through the sound vary in their mode (*vrtti*) due to loud or feeble voice etc, the essence or meaning (*sphot-tattva*) remains unhampered. The primary sound (*prakrtadhvani*) in the revealer of the *sphota* and the varying modes of sound (*vaikrta dhvani*) do not affect the character of the former. The meaning is revealed gradually by the sequence of pronounced letters. The meaning embodied in a sentence is manifested gradually by the sound of letters and words, just as the color of a hen that are implicitly present in the egg are manifested gradually.

Thus, it is not the *sphota* but the manifestation of it (*sphota-vyanjana*) that takes place successively from letters to words and through words to the sentence. The revelation of *sphota* depends not only on the syllables that are uttered, but also on the order (*krama*) in which they are uttered. The meaning becomes clear when the last syllable is uttered and conjoined to the preceding ones by memory the whole act of apprehension is simultaneous. In this way the function of *sphota* lies in the manifestation of the word by retaining the eternity of *sphota*.

## Kinds of *Sphota*:

The *vaiyakaranas* describe *sphota* as that eternal word-symbol (*nitya-sabda*) which is:-

- i. different from letters (*Varanatirikta*)
- ii. manifestable by letters (*Varna-abhivyangya*)
- iii. -indicative of meaning (*Artha-pratyayaka*)

'*varnatirikta varnabhivyangyah artha pratyayakah nitya sabdah*'.

Nagesha Bhatta in his *sphotavada* has mentioned the following eight kinds of *sphota*:

- 1.-*Varna sphota*
- 2.-*Pada sphota*
- 3.-*Vakya sphota*
- 4.-*Varna -Jatisphota*

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5.-*Pada – jatisphota*

6.-*Vakya- jati- sphota*

7.-*Akhanda pada sphota*

8.- *Akhanda – vkya -sphota*

See them briefly:-

1.- *Varna sphota*: -

According to *varna sphota*, the potency of generating the sense (*sphota*) lies in the letters (*varna*) alone. These are no potency of generating the meaning (*sphota*) without letters (*sphotah-varnabhyan-vyatriekatah*) though the letters occur in different words and sentences, the essential unity of letters cannot be denied. It is the combination of letters that constitutes a word and it is a combination of word that constitutes a sentence. The theory of *Varna sphota* has been supported by the *Mimamsakas*. Saber Swami in his commentary on '*Jamini sutra*' says that the word '*gauh*' (cow) is nothing but combination of letters (g, au, and h). Kumarila Bhatta in his '*Slokavartika*' has made a strong attempt to establish the *varnavada*.

2.- *Pada sphota*: -

When the meaning generates from the combination of letters in regular sequence or fixed order (*nitya krama*) is called *pada sphota*. The *pada vadins* put the premium on words and not on letters or sentence. That is why such words as *sarah* (lake) and *rasah* (juice) etc through consisting of the same letters carry different meanings. They put emphasis on the power of the whole (*samudya- shakti*). *Pada vada sphota* has been supported by *Naiyayikas*.

3.-*Vakya sphota*: -

While the *Mimamsaka* are *varna vadins* and the *Naiyayikas* are *pada vadins*, the *vaiyakarans* are *vakyavadins*. They hold that the real unit of language is a sentence (*vayka*) and not words on letters. The great grammarian Bhartrhari has expounded the above view in his '*Vakyapadiyam*'. The division of the sentence into letters or words is only artificial. The components letters and words are only abstractions and present a semblance of separate parts (*avaya-vabhasa*) in a whole which is really partless.

4.- *Varna-jati-sphota*: -

According to *varna-jati-sphota* a letter is treated as a class of individuals having a common character ( *jati* ). The *Naiyayikas* hold this view. The upholders of *varna-jati-vada* contend that a letters like 'G' cannot be regarded as one individual burg different persons can pronounce 'G' differently at the same time. This shows that all 'G' s are not the same but similar in as much as they same but similar in as much as they possess a common character. Just as different cows, in spite of difference in size, shape, color, etc. possess an essential common attribute of cowness, so we should bring all the 'G's under a universal 'G' ness which is inherent in G every time that G is pronounced.

5.-*Pada-jati-sphota* :-

According to *pada-jati-sphota* a word or pada should not be as a class (*jati*). for example the word cow just as different cows in spite of difference in size, shape, color etc. possess an essential common attribute cowness. The cows are innumerable but as the law of parsimony (*Laghava Nyaya*) demands that instead of treating each cow as a separate individual (*prathak vyakti*) we

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should bring all the cows under a universal cowness which is inherent in every cow.

6.-*Vakya-jati-sphota* :-

The *vakyajati sphota* is taken to for the sake of brevity (*laghva*). In other words in such expression as “the same letter” or “the same word” or “the same sentence” the word ‘same’ means ‘of the same kind: such usage of the word ‘same’ denoting ‘similar’ or of the ‘same kind’ can be seen in such expressions as “I am taking the same medicine as you took last years” Thus a letters or a word or a sentence should be treated not a unique individual but as a class. This is the stand taken by the supporters of *Jati sphota vada*.

7.-*Akhanda-pada-sphota* :-

*Sphota* may be viewed as external (*bahya*) or internal (*antara*). From the former standpoint what is spoken is looked upon as consisting of parts (*sakhanda*); from the inner perspective it is taken as a unitary part less whole (*akhanda*). On the practical plane the word is *sakhanda*. But from all inner perspective, all such distinctions of parts are only artificial; the meaning as a whole is one and indivisible (*akhanda*). This is known as *akhanda-pada-sphota* and it is sponsored by the *Vaiyakaranas*.

8.- *Akhanda-Vakya-sphota*:-

From an inner perspective, all distinctions of root word (*pratepadika*) and suffix (*vibhakti*) are only artificial, the meaning as a whole is one and indivisible. This view is known as *akhandavakya sphota*, and is the generally recognized view of the *Vaiyakaranas*. According to them the meaning of a sentence is really part less (*niravayava*) i.e., devoid of letters and words (*varna-pada-rahita*). when the very existence of a letter or word eg cow or *gauh* as a separate entity is unreal, the question whether it is an individual (*vyakti*) or universal (*jati*) does not arise.

In this way the eminent grammarian Nagesha Bhatt gave the eight kinds of *sphota* in his ‘*sphotavada*’.

Patanjali in his *Mahabhasya* describes *sphota* as a word essence. A word is nor a mere combination of letters (*varna-samudya*) but a permanent symbol. when it is said that a word is produced (*sabdha jayate*), what is really meant is that the word is revealed or manifest (*abhivyatka*) and not created (*utpanna*). Similarly when one says *sabdah nasyati* (the word vanishes), what is meant is that the word disappears and not that it perishes. This view of eternity of word (*sabda nitya vada*) is further elaborated by Kaiyata.

The theory of *sphota* has been explained, elaborately by such eminent grammarians as Bhartrhari in his ‘*Vakya-padiyam*’ and by Nagesha Bhatt in his ‘*Sphotavada*’. It is also discussed in detail in such grammarian treatises as ‘*Laghumanjusa*’, ‘*Vaiyakarana Bhusanasara*’ etc. The *Mimamsa* view has been expounded by Kumarila Bhatt in his ‘*Sloka-vartika*’. The *Naiyayika* view has been ably advocated by Jayanta Bhatta in his ‘*Nyaya Siddhanta Manjari*’.

According to *Tantrika* philosophy, the cosmic seed (*vindu*) originates from creative sound. supreme consciousness that is manifested through speech is all pervading and part less. The *Vaiyakaranas* call this eternal (*nitya*) indivisible *Sabda Brahman* which is the ultimate cause of the world by the name of ‘*sphota*’.

According to the *Atharva veda*, the ultimate principle of all language or speech in the supreme Being. It is by virtue of speech that all gods, men and animals live in the universe. The

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*Vaiyakaranas* describes *sphota* as ultimately one whole that is indivisible and eternal (*nitya*).

But the theory of *sphota* as propounded by the *Vaiyakaranas* has been subjected to criticism by various schools of thought, particularly the *Naiyayikas* and the *Mimamsa*.

Let us see them briefly:-

\*The *Naiyayikas* do not recognize *sabda* as eternal. Gautama in his '*Nyaya Sutra*' give a number of arguments to establish his theory of non-eternity of *sabda* (*sabda-anityatavada*).

The gist of argument is that the '*sabda*' is manifested through sound and sound has got both a beginning and an end. The drum is silent until it is beaten. A bell is mute there is a contact between two things such a contact takes place at some particular point of time. For example, when we pronounce a letter, e.g. ka, it is due to the contact of air with the vocal organ. Thus, all words are produced by some kind of contact and hence have a beginning. Similarly, sounds produced spread like currents (*vici-taranga-nyaya*) and come to an end like passing waves, Hence they are not eternal (*nitya*) but transient (*anitya*). Had they been beginningless (*anandi*) or endless (*Ananta*) they would have been always audible.

Thus, the *Naiyayikas* reject the theory of eternity of *sabda* and the concept of an eternal *sphota*, which according to them cannot be established by any means of proof i.e., by perception, inference, analogy or authority.

The *vaiyakaranas* and the *mimamsakas* reply to the *Naiyayikas* by saying that is not the *sabda* but a manifestation of it (i.e. sound or *dhvani*) which has got a beginning and an end. A word is not created but revealed by pronunciation. Just as the sun is perceived by many persons and is yet one and the same, similarly the word also though perceived by many in diverse circumstances is one and the same. Thus the *Naiyayika* theory of the origin of word (*sabdotpattivada*) is replaced by the theory of manifestation of words (*sabd-abhivyakti-vada*)

\*But the *Mimamsa* theory of eternity of words (*sabda-nityatavada*) does not mean that all words or sentences are eternal. It means the eternity of letters which are indivisible and constitute the permanent basis of all words (*varna-anityatavada*). Thus, *Mimamsakas* do not subscribe to the *Vaiyakarna* theory of *akhanda-vakya-sphota*.

\*The *Vedantins* also criticize the notion of *sphota* as expounded by the grammarians like Bhartrhari, as Sankara reject the concept as an unnecessary hypothesis. The emergence of meaning from successive sounds can be explained, they say, by the powers of synthetic apprehension that lies in intellect (*samastapratyayavimarsini buddhi*) by means of which we apprehends the members of a series as one whole. This view, as Dr. D.M. Dutta observes, anticipates Kant's theory of synthetic unity of apperception and the approach of gestalt psychology.

The *Mimamsakas*, the *Naiyayikas*, the *Vedantins*, the *Buddhists* and the *Jains* do not see eye to eye with the *Vaiyakaranas* on the theory of *sphota*. The *sphota-vada* has been criticized by Kumarila Bhatt in his '*Sloka vartika*', by Vyasa in his '*Yoga-Bhasya*' and by Dharmakriti in his '*Pranam vartika*'.

The concept of *sphota* however finds support from Mandana Mishra in his '*sphota siddhi*' and from Vacaspati Mishra in his '*Tattva vindu*'.

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The great merit of *shphotavada* lies in the fact that it invites attention to a very thought – provoking linguistic issue. How can we explain the felt unity of a word? How does a meaning arise from a multiplicity of passing sounds? How can relation of words be explained by means of words themselves?

The question is yet a riddle and can challenge the intelligence of thinkers even today. The minute discussion on the subject from various perspectives in the different schools of thought can open fresh avenues for thinking in field of linguistic analysis even today. *Shphotavada* is an important aspect of Indian linguistic trends. There are many more scope to explore in this field. Both these concepts are core or the base of Indian linguistic philosophy. One must understand these first in order to unfold the vast Indian linguistic trends. It is all due to the rigorous hard work of our ancient scholars that Indian linguistic philosophy today has succeeded in making us aware of the universal tool of expression and meaning.

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