

***Śabdādvaitavāda*: Bhartr̥hari's Vision of Language and Reality**

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Abstract

The significance of Bhartr̥hari's *Śabdādvaitavāda* as a profound investigation of the multifaceted relationship between *śabda*, *artha*, and reality, stands out as truly newsworthy and gives a noteworthy perspective on the investigation of language. This philosophical system upheld everyday thinking by announcing that language isn't simply an apparatus for correspondence however the actual premise of reality and cognizance. Bhartr̥hari's address is engraved definitely as far as etymological inquiry and awesome request, in semantic hypothesis and otherworldliness. It draws matches with Advaita Vedanta, accentuating non-duality, yet contrasts by focusing language (*śabda*) as the centre of the real world.

Bhartr̥hari asserts that language creates the world, shaping our perceptions, thoughts, and experiences. He explores the intricate bond between words (*pada*) and objects (*artha*), demonstrating how words shape our understanding of reality. To explain the relation between the eternal *śabdatattva* and the produced word Bhartr̥hari mentioned four levels of Language. Those are-*Parā* (transcendental stage), *Paśyanti* (beyond human comprehension), *Madhyamā* (mental language), *Vaikhari* or verbal (human language). The non-duality of *śabda* and *artha* brings up captivating philosophical issues. While they seem particular, Bhartr̥hari battles that their division is a consequence of human insight and phonetic shows. He makes sense of this solidarity through the idea of the *sphoṭa* hypothesis, which sets that the pith of language is a resolute entire, uncovered through discourse. In this way, Bhartr̥hari's way of thinking shown us a new dimension of thinking on the language.

This paper centers around Bhartr̥hari's inventive way to deal with accommodating the clear contrast among *śabda* and *artha*, demonstrating how he dissolves this distinction into a unified, non-dualistic comprehension of language and reality.

Keywords: *Śabda, Artha, Advaita, Nitya, Dhvani, Sphoṭa, Brahman.*

Introduction:

Bhartrihari is known to us as the bearer of grammarian tradition of Pāṇinī and Patañjali but Bhartrihari is not only identified as a Grammarian, but also as a philosopher. Bhartrihari transcends the limits of grammar and language analysis set by his ancestors to develop philosophy of language. In Indian Philosophy, there is a rich discussion on the nature of language. Different theorists deeply discussed on the nature of language and the functions of language but among the discussions, Bhartrihari's theory of language is a unique attempt at a comprehensive philosophy of language. Bhartrihari's view about the theory of language occupied an important place in philosophy of language. Bhartrihari have some distinct and definite thought from the Mīmāṃsā and Nyāya schools as well as Grammarians. B.k. Matilal stated that, "the overall concern with how our language works was not the chief concern of most classical Indian philosophers, except for the grammarians like Bhartrihari".¹ Bhartrihari's concept of *śabda* is different from Nyāya and others. According to Nyāya philosophy words have the potentiality to express meaning. *Śabda* and *artha* both are produced object and they are non-eternal. But Bhartrihari defines *śabda* as eternal and *artha* is conceived as *vivarta* of *śabda*. Hence, as the *vivarta* of *śabda*, *artha* also is taken as eternal. Bhartrihari's view of '*śabda*' can be explained in two ways: firstly, he explains '*śabda*' as an act, where the functions of language are analyzed, and, secondly, he viewed '*śabda*' as a '*tattva*', where *śabda* is taken as the supreme reality, through which he explains the phenomenal world. According to Grammarians every cognition is embedded within language. There is no cognition which is not involved with language. Bhartrihari stated that, '*na soasti pratyoyo loke jah śabdānugamadṛte/anubidhamiba jñānam sarbam śabdena vāsate*'.² Bhartrihari is the profounder of *śabdādvaitavāda* or *śabdabrahmavāda*. Bhartrihari explains how the phenomenal world is manifested from the supreme reality. According to him there are only one fundamental reality, i.e, *śabdabrahman*. The *Śabdabrahman* is eternal and the phenomenal world, which is described as *artharūpa jagat* manifested as the *vivarta* of the *śabdabrahman*. As Advaita vedāntins explain the whole world is transformed from the *Brahman*, similarly the world of *śabda* and *artha* is transformed from '*śabda-brahman*'. Bhartrihari also gives a distinct view about the meaning. According to Bhartrihari's *śabda* is not the gross sound, it is *sphotātmaka śabda*, This *Sphoṭa* is one and eternal. The meaning of a sound which is intelligible to us is *Sphoṭa*. Bhartrihari accepts the view of *trimuṇī vyakaraṇa*, he stating that "*Nityāḥ śabdārthasambandhāstatrāmnātā maharṣibhiḥ/ sūtrānāmatanumtrānām bhāṣyaṅānca praṇetrbhī*",³ which means *śabda*, *artha*, and *sambandha* are identical and eternal. *Sphoṭa* is something different from *dhvani*. *Dhvani* is defined as *uccāryamāna śabda* or articulated sound. *Sphoṭa* is a permanent original form of *śabda* but the *dhvani* is not. *Dhvani* is audible and utterable but the *sphoṭa* is not. *Sphoṭa* is manifested by articulated sounds. *Dhvani* have variation in different utterance. Distinction of time, speed of utterance, etc. can affect the variation of *dhvani* but *sphoṭa* cannot be affected by these. For example, when a person hears

a sound like drumbeat, person who is close to the sound hears it stronger and a person who is far from the drumbeat hears sound less than the close person. Though, the sounds produced by beating the drum differ, the drumbeat remains the same. Likewise, the variations of sounds do not affect *sphoṭa*. Sound has two aspects. One is individual realisation (*dhvani*) and other is actualised entity (*sphoṭa*). In one side *sphoṭa* is related to the sound aspect of speech and other side it is related to the meaning aspect of speech. B.K. Matilal states, “the Indian grammarian’s theory of *sphoṭa* has been acclaimed as one of the most important contributions to central problem of general linguistics as well as philosophy of language”.⁴

Nature of *śabda*

The main objective of Vyākaraṇa śāstra is ‘*Śabdānuśāsanm*’,⁵ hence it is necessary to define the nature of *śabda*. *Śabda* is the basis of human language and also it is as well the cause of other speechless animal (*avyakta vāk prāṇī*) use. It is also found that the material objects also somehow incur sound, for example, sound of flowing river, sound of waterfalls etc. In all these cases we also use the term ‘*śabda*’. Now the question is which kind of *śabda* is the subject matter of Grammar. When *prayokṭṛi puruṣa* or motivated person uses *śabda* to make others understanding, that particular type of *śabda* is called ‘*upādāna śabda*’ and Grammarians are concerned about this *śabda*. Vṛittikāra Harivṛṣavadeva states, “*śabdaśabdasya nadīghoṣādāyapi darśanādavaccinattiḥ upādānaśabdeṣviti/ upādāno vācakaḥ; teṣu uccaratsu dvau śabdau laṅṣyete/ śabdavarūpārthavadhāraṇe*

kāryadvayadarśanādanumiyamānabhedau/ eka iti/ pratipādakaisyaikāḥ śabdo nimittam/ aparastu arthapratipatteḥ”.⁶ *Upādāna śabda* presented to common people as one and identical form but for those who are well aware of the nature of *śabda* (*śabdavīda*) there are two separate *śabda*. Grammarians define these *śabda* as *dhvani* and *sphoṭa*. Bhartṛhari also admits these two types of *śabda*. He says – “*dvavupādānaśabdeṣu śabdou śabdavido viduh/ eko nimittam śabdānāmaparohrthe proyujyate*”⁷ According to Bhartṛhari *śabda* are of two types, one is *nimitta śabda* and the other *upādāna śabda*. Bhartṛhari states, “*Dhvanih sphoṭaśca śabdānām dhvanista khalu laṅṣyate/ alpo mahamśca kesancidubhayaṁ tatsvabhāvata*”.⁸ The *varṇas* which are generated through *sthāna-karaṇādi saṁghātajanya*, are *kṣaṇika* (momentary), *kramaviśiṣṭa* (serial) and *arthahīna* (meaningless); but these *varṇas* are the cause of *akhaṇḍa* (unitary), *akrama* (without order) and *nitya* (eternal) *śabda*, and they act as *upādāna śabda*. The first *śabda* is known as *dhvani* and the second one is known as *sphoṭa*. *Upādāna śabda* or *dhvani* is the cause of *śabda-vyāvahāra* and it is the cause of *arthajñāna* (understanding of meaning). First *śabda* (*dhvanirūpa śabda*) is the cause of second *śabda* (*sphoṭa śabda*) and the second *śabda* (*sphoṭa śabda*) is the cause of meaning. Mahābhāṣyakāra Patañjali also mentioned these two types of *śabda*. He states that, “*tatparantatkālasya*”.⁹

Bhartṛhari defines *upādāna śabda* in a different way. According to him three types of *upādāna śabda*, they are-

1. *Vācaka upādāna*
2. *Upādānaḥ dyotyakah*
3. *Samudāya upādāna*

Those who have admitted the *vācya-vācaka sambandha* between *śabda* and *artha*, they are the proponent of first view. According to them *vācaka śabda* is *upādāna śabda*. They accept the *bheda* between *śabda* and *artha*. Those who think that *artha* has no separate existence from *śabda* they are the second theorists, they accept the *dyotyā-dyotyaka-bhava* relation between *śabda* and *artha*. For example, *jñāna* and *ādityādi padārtha* they are self *dyotaka*. Some may argue that in *dyotyā-dyotaka* relation, also the *bheda* is somehow apparent. It is said that, there is no problem *dyotyā-dyotaka-bhava* relation even if the *bheda* i.e., intrinsic difference between *śabda* and *artha* is not present. For example, *jñāna* and *ādityādi jyoti padārtha* are eliminating *dyotaka* by themselves while they express the meaning (*artha*) as well as themselves (*śabda*). In the context of *śabda* and *artha*, *śabda* is *dyotaka* and *artha* is *dyotyā* by them. According to third view '*upādāna śabda*' denotes '*upādāna samudāya*'. In a Grammatician application when suffix is added to a *śabda* for example, '*agnerdhak*' *Sūtra*¹⁰ or in the case of imitating someone uses of '*govimīyāmāha*' etc. In those cases, no extra meaning evolves out of those applications apart from the original *śabda* itself. In all those cases *śabda* is accounted as *svarūpapadārthaka*, or engulfing the meaning (*artha*) in its own original form. Therefore, in all such cases *śabda* is uttered as *svarūpapadārthaka*. *Upādāna śabda* is illustrated as part less, one, whole as '*agni*', '*go*' etc. Bhartṛhari states *upādāna śabda* in *svopaṅja* commentary, "*upādīyate yenārthaḥ, svarūpe adhyāropyte, tadbhāvamivāpādyate sa upādānaśabdaḥ*".¹¹ According to Grammarians *upādāna śabda* is estimated as the *mūlakāraṇa* of all the verbal behaviors or the original cause. According to Naiyāikas, who are *ārambhavādīn*, *samavāyi kāraṇa* is the *upādāna* and for Advaita Vedāntīn who are *vivartavādīn*, *vivarta kāraṇa* is the *upādāna*. Since, Bhartṛhari is the propounder of *vivartavāda* for him, *śabda* is the *vivarta upādāna* and it is the cause of *jagatprapañca*. For example, in the case of *bhramajñāna* (erroneous cognition), a snake (*sarpa*) is the *vivarta* (manifested form) of *rajju* (rope) while it appears as identical with the *rajju* (rope).

Similarly, *artha* is the *vivarta* of *śabda* and it is appeared as identical with *śabda*, while *śabda*, *artha* and their relation is presented varigatively in our cognition due to *avidyā*, practically the *artha* is manifested form of *sphoṭarūpa śabda*.

From the above discussion it is clear that two types of *śabda* are accepted by the Grammatician. A question may arise whether these two types of *śabdās* are different? or indifferent? In this context Bhartṛhari presents some *prācīna* view. He states, "*Ātmabhedastayoh kecidastityahuh purāṅagāḥ/ buddhibhedadbhinnasya bhedameke pracaksate*".¹² The term '*purāṅagā*' indicates the ancient *ācārayas* who have the knowledge of *śabdasthiti pramāṇa*. In Harivṛṣabha vṛtti, the term '*purāṅgā*' define as "*purāṅagā pūrve smaranāḥ*".¹³ Some *ācārayas* think that the difference between two kinds of *śabdās* is real.

According to them *dhvani śabda* or *vaikharī śabda* which is the expresser of *sphoṭa śabda* and *paśyanti śabda* or *sphoṭa śabda* which is expressed by *dhvani* are different, because one is the cause and other is the effect. Cause and effect cannot be identical, they must be different. For example, mud is the cause of pot. These two are essentially different and their *arthakriyākāritva* (usefulness) are different. The necessities of pot cannot be fulfilled by mud. We cannot bear water by mud but can bear by pot. Hence according to this view *dhvani śabda*, which is the cause, and, *sphoṭa śabda*, which is the effect, are different. Other theorists do not accept the difference between *dhvani* and *sphoṭa* as real. According to them, due to our different points of view, sometimes *śabda* presented in our cognition as *dhvani* and sometimes as *sphoṭa*. The difference of knowledge (*buddhibheda*) is the cause of this different perception. They also hold that, actually the *kārya* and *kāraṇa* are identical by nature. When it is presented in our knowledge as mud or *mṛttikā*, it is taken as *kāraṇa* (cause) and when it is presented as a pot or *ghata* it is called *kārya* (effect). Hence, ‘*mṛdghata*’ (clay pot) is presented as identical entity as well as a single definite expression. The *bheda* or *abheda* is actually the *bheda* between *śabdākṛti* and *śabdavyakti* or identical disposition is actually expressing *śabdākṛti* and *śabdavyakti*. The *jāti* of all *śabdās* are known as ‘*śabdākṛiti*’ and the particular *śabda* is known as ‘*śabdavyakti*’. Some theorists admit the *abheda* between *śabdākṛti* and *śabdavyakti*. Some accepts the *bheda* between these two. This discussion will continue in proceeding section. Now we shall focus on the relation between two types of *śabda*, i.e., *dhvani* and *sphoṭa*.

Bhartṛhari defines the relation between *sphoṭa* and *dhvani* through an example. The fire is inducted only by the friction of *araṇi kāṣṭha* (churning stick) though it remains already there. Similarly, *śabda* is also lies in once interact and when it is exposed it seems to be different as sound or *śruti*. Following the *satkāryavāda* the unrevealed element of fire resides in *araṇi*, as a result of friction fire is revealed in gross form. According to *ārambhavādīn* or *asatkāryavādīn*, the element (*teja*) did not actually exist in *araṇi* but the potency of producing fire existing in *araṇi* should be taken as the cause. Therefore, both theorists accept that the subtle form of fire resides in *araṇi*. Haribṛṣabha states, “*satkāryavādī tadnupalambhād vījabhaveneiva avasthitamicchati/ asatkāryādyapi jyotiṣ utpādānaśaktim tatrecchtyeva iti*”.¹⁴ Just as fire (*jyoti*) resides in the *araṇi kāṣṭha* (churning stick) similarly in form of seed (*vījākāra*) of *śabdātattva* resides in *prayokṭri puruṣa buddhi*. When it is expressed through *sthāna- karaṇādi-ghāta*, on manifested it becomes the cause of meaning.¹⁵

The concept of Śabdabrahman

To understand Bhartṛhari’s theory of language, first we need to understand the concept of *śabdabrahman*. Ācārya Bhartṛhari’s philosophical exploration started with the concept of *śabdabrahman*. Bhartṛhari states this as the ultimate reality. The concepts of existence, consciousness and language-being used, which are related with our understanding of the empirical world exhibit the elements of plurality. Yet all these concepts are word-generated. So, they are limited by a

common essence. This essence is known by Bhartṛhari *śabdatattva*. It is the brahman or the ultimate reality.

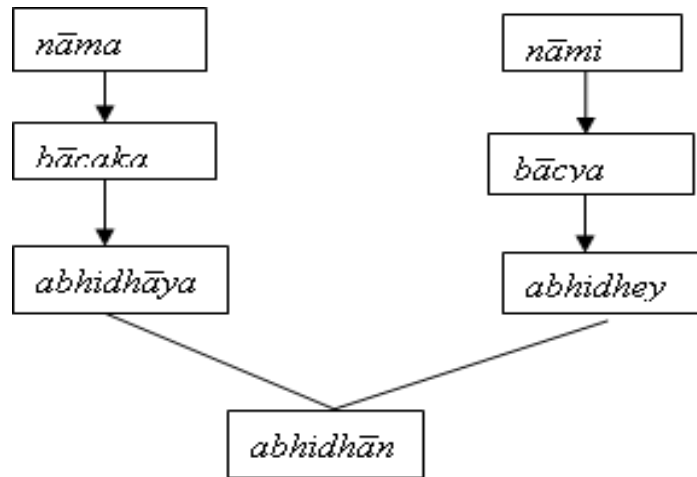
Bhartṛhari explains the nature of *śabdabrahma* in first *kārikā* of his text *Vākyapadīya*.

“*Anādīnidhanam brahma śabdatattvaṃ yadaḥṣaram
Vivartatearthavāben prakriyā jagata yataḥ*”.¹⁶

Having no beginning (*anādi*) nor an end (*ananta*), this *śabdatattvarūpa Brahman* or *śabdabrahman* is known as *aḥṣara* and it is the cause of the world of meaning (*artharūpa jagata*). Bhartṛhari uses the word ‘*brahman*’ to explain the *śabdatattva*. The term ‘*brahman*’ means the reality in *Advaita Vedānta* and *Upaniṣadic* context. Ontologically this term came from ‘*bringhanāt*’. ‘*Brahman*’ means ‘too wide’ (*atiśaya vyāpaka*).

This term derived from the root *vrh* which means ‘to grow, to expand, and to become great’. This *śabdatattva* is *anādīnidhana* or *nitya*. Noted that, Bhartṛhari uses the term ‘*anādi-nidhana*’ instead of using the term ‘*nitya*’. The reason behind this is to indicate *ātyāntika nityatā* (ultimate eternity). The term ‘*nityatā*’ (eternality) not only refers the *Brahman* but also refer the *ātmā, ākāśa, dīka, kāla*. “*Tasmāt vā ekasmāt ātmanḥ ākāśa sambhūtaḥ ākāśādvāyuh vāyuragniḥ agnerapaḥ abhya pṛithivīḥ*”¹⁷ this *śruti* support the origination of these *padārthas*. These *padārthas* are relatively eternal (*āpekṣik nitya*), Bhartṛhari does not intend to refer these objects as *Brahman*. His intention is to mean the absolute eternity or *ātyāntika nityatā*. But still there is a problem that, in stated *śruti*, *kāla* is not mentioned. What about the eternity of *kāla*? *Kāla* is also not ‘*anādi-nidhana*’, because about the origination of *kāla* there is *śruti*, “*mayam tu prakṛti vidyān*”.¹⁸ *Iswara* (God) created the *jagata* where *kāla* is the *nimitta* and *māyā* is *prakṛti* or *upādāna kāraṇa*. G.N. Sastri also stated that the term used to refer something which cannot be applicable for “time”.¹⁹ The *śabdabrahman* known as *aḥṣara*. The term *aḥṣara* means which is not destroyable (*na ḥṣarati iti aḥṣaram, na ḥṣaram iti vidyāt*).²⁰ This term has two implications; one is indicating the *Parabrahmana svarūpa śabda* and other is indicating *nitya varṇa* (eternal letter). But K.A.S Iyer define the term as phonemes.²¹ According to him, generally the term ‘*aḥṣara*’ means eternity but Bhartṛhari defines this term as phonemes and *śabdatattva* as well as the cause of manifested phonemes. In *Pradipatīkā* it states, “*saraṇa pratyayasya anubandhalope kṛte anukaraṇaṃ sava iti/ tatra artham aśnute vyapnotītyakram pada vākyam va*”.²² It means, *paramabrahmarūpa śabda* is *aḥṣara* and it is not only covered *artha*, also the *pada* and *vākyas*. The second line of the *kārika* states, “*śabdabrahman* is that which appears as objects, and forms whom the creation of the world proceeds”. The world of meaning is the *vivarta* of the higher and only reality. According to Bhartṛhari this world is *śabdātma*. Hence, the cause of it will also be the *śabda*. His argument is-it is the word which sees the object, it is the word which speaks, it is the word which reveals the object which lying hidden and it is on the word that multiple word rests. Bhartṛhari defines the *jagata prapañca* is the *vivarta* of *śabdabrahman*. *Vivarta* (manifestation) is

adhyāsa. In *vivarta*, the transformation of *kāraṇa* is not real transformation. For example, of *śukti-rajata bhramajñāna*, where the property of *rajat* (*rajatattva*) does not exist in *śukti* but this property imposed on *śukti* and the *idantā* property of *śukti* imposed in *rajat*. As a result, the front object appears in our knowledge as *idam rajatam*. Similarly, in the case of *śabda vivarta*, the transformation of *nitya brahmasvarūpa śabda* is not real. When the properties are imposed on *śabda*, it becomes *vācy-vācaka* or *nāma-nāmi*. The *vivarta* of *śabda* can be explained in many ways. Such as, *nitya brahmasvarūpa* is *praṇava dhvani*. When the *praṇava dhvani* is delimited (*avaccinna*) it becomes *nāmarūpa*. Which means the subtle *śabda* is formed in *vaikharī* or *madhyamā* level and it is known as *nāmarūpa*. *Śabda* expressed in *abhidhāna-abhidhayaka- abhidheya* form or *nāma (vācaka)-nāmi (vācy) bhāva*. For example, the term ‘*ghata*’ is *abhidhāyaka*, the object ‘*ghata*’ is *abhidheya* and the action of uttered is *abhidhāna*. Likewise, *nitya varṇas* which exists in speaker’s intellect (‘*a-kārādi*’ form) is *abhidhāyaka*, uttered *varṇas* are *abhidheya* and the action is *abhidhāna*. The word-world relationship is explained by the graph bellow-



Buddhist philosophers raise objection against *śabda nityatā*. According to them if *kārya padārtha* is *vādhita prakāraka* then the *kāraṇa* is also be *vādhita prakāraka*. Therefore, as the *artharūpajagata* is *vādhita prakāraka*, the *śabdabrahman* which the *kāraṇa* of *jagat* is also be *vādhita prakāraka*. Which leads to *śūnyavāda*. Some philosophers claimed that Bhartṛhari is the follower of Buddhist *śūnyavāda*. But the claim is not true. Bhartṛhari replies on objection. When *jagata* exist in its *kāraṇa* in *svarūpa sambandha*, the *kāraṇarūpa Brahman* is *sat. kārya- kāraṇa* is different when these are *avaccinna* (delimited) by *deśa* (space), *kāla* (time), *sattā* (existence). But when the *avacchedaka* (delimitter) does not exist, *kārya-kāraṇa* will be identical. Bhartṛhari explains *śabdabrahman* as the cause of the entire world in another *kārika*. He states that, “*ekasya sarvabījasya yasya ceyamanekadhā/ bhokṛ-bhoktavaryarūpeṇa bhogarūpeṇa ca sthitihi*”.²³ The one and only reality is

the *śabda-brahman* and it is the cause of all, from whom

the creation of the world proceeds. This one reality presented to us in many forms. To it belongs the manifestation form of enjoyer and the enjoyment. It can be explained by given an example; the sun is only one but its reflection is many. All reflection reflected sun are created by only one sun. Similarly, *śabdatattva* is the ultimate and one reality but it is expressed by many forms. Bhartṛhari explains this with the comparison of Veda. “*Prāptuypāyonukāraśca tasya vedo maharṣibhih/ ekohpyanekavartmeva sāmāmnātaḥ pṛithaka pṛithaka*”.²⁴ Veda is one and indivisible but Veda is divided by Kṛṣṇadvaipayana in many branches for us those have the limitation of intellect. As despite of many branches the oneness of Veda did not ruin, similarly despite of many forms of *śabda*, the oneness of *śabdatattva* does not ruin. Bhartṛhari explain this on *tīkā*, “*pratiśākhām pratiniyataśaktayoh śabdaḥ arthapratyayonenāpūrvangabhābena*”.²⁵

Language Transformation

Bhartṛhari’s *Śabdādvaitavāda* holds that language and reality are the same. Bhartṛhari argues that the world and all phenomena are inseparable from *śabda*. An objection can be raised on this theory that how the eternal *śabda* will be same as empirical language use because it is produced *śabda*. To clear the problem Bhartṛhari gives a picture of sound transformation. There are four classes of *śabda*, such as *Parā*, *Paśyantī*, *Madhymā* and *Vaikharī*. *Parā* and *paśyanti* are non-articulated sounds. *Parā* is the transcendental nature and the ultimate reality behind the whole language. It is the undifferentiated, formless level of *śabda*, which is identical with *Brahman*. *Paśyantī* is the original *śabda* which lying at the core of all *śabda*. In this level where *śabda* begins to take form in thought or intention. *Madhymā* is the *bouddhika* or intellect stage and the cause of *vaikharī* only. It is the mental and structured form of *śabda*. In this stage *śabda* is ready for articulation. *Vaikharī* is the articulated stage, it is the spoken or externalized form of *śabda*, it is transformed from the *parā śabda*, hence no objection can be raised on that. Bhartṛhari clearly explains the eternal *śabda* and the produced non-eternal *śabda* as the same. The distinctions we perceive between objects, thoughts, and words are due to our limited understanding and not an inherent duality.

The most challenge for any Monistic Philosophy is to handle the gap between plurality and unity. And it is the uniqueness of Bhartṛhari’s *Śabdādvaita* theory that it successfully handles the problem of bridging the gap between plurality and unity. He successfully explains the word and the existence.

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