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## Values In Indian Thought

Two functions of knowledge are spoken of in Indian thought.<sup>1</sup>

1. Theoretical, revealing the existence of some object (*artha-paricchitti*)  
-fact
2. Practical, help in the attainment of some purpose in life (*phala-prapti*) -value

For example, a thirsty traveller, who happens to come upon a stream of fresh water, discovers a fact: and later, when he quenches his thirst by drinking the water, he realizes a value.

Unlike modern Western thought where facts and values are often taken as two disconnected realms (e.g. Scientists discover facts—nuclear energy—but are not concerned with the purposes for which these facts may be used—nuclear war—) in Indian thought these functions are regarded as closely connected with each other, since knowledge of some fact leads to the pursuit of some value. The Indian view of the intimate connection between fact and value, between theoretical and practical knowledge, between what we teach and what we do, has an important message for the modern world. Namely, that there is no neutral knowledge of facts. All facts contain an implied value.

Nowhere is this connection more dramatically demonstrated today than in the area of medical science. Discoveries of ways to prolong life, imply that life should be prolonged. Questions of value are immediately raised. How long should life be prolonged? What if the patient does not wish life to be prolonged, but perhaps a relative does? Of course the reverse situation could apply. Economic issues are also raised. Life-prolonging operations (e.g. heart replacement) are very costly. Could this money be better used in preventive health measures that would provide benefit to a large number of people, rather than to

only one person. New discoveries of medical facts immediately raise questions of value—the questions of medical ethics.

The modern attitude to the arts also serves to highlight the connection between fact and value. The modern slogan, “Art for Art’s sake” leads sometimes to a practice of art disconnected from any purpose. Painting or music may turn in upon itself and become lost in explorations of techniques and end up leading nowhere. In Indian aesthetics, art has always had a clear value—to help one to realize the meaning and purpose of life. The emotion aroused in drama, dance or music is not meant merely to titillate but to induce within one the experience of the essence of life—ultimately to take one to *Shanti Rasa*, the direct experience of the peace of God.

For me personally, it is in the use and function of words that the Indian understanding of the intimate connection between fact and value has had the greatest impact.<sup>2</sup> As a child my mother told me the Gospels and I experienced these words as having ultimate value—they gave to me “my meaning and purpose for life.” Later in Sunday School, University and Seminary, I was taught to understand the Christian Scripture as human literature, as facts removed from their ultimate value and point of reference—God. It was through my study of the understanding of language and scripture presented in Indian thought by the 5th century scholar, Bhartṛhari, that I have been reawakened to the ultimate value as well as the true fact of Christian scripture.

Bhartṛhari emphasizes the aim of language as leading both to *svarga* (heaven) and *mokṣa* (ultimate release) not only in the *Vākyapadīya* but also in his commentary on Patanjali’s *Māhābhāṣya*.<sup>3</sup> At the beginning of the *Vākyapadīya* Bhartṛhari says Grammar (*Vyākaraṇa*) is the door leading to liberation (I:14); it is the straight royal road for those who desire salvation (I:16); and by means of it one attains the supreme Brahman (I:22). At the end of the first chapter Bhartṛhari returns to the topic and states that “the purification of the word is the means to the attainment of the Supreme Self. One who knows the essence of its activity attains the immortal Brahman.” (V.P.I:131). Knowledge of the Word, then, has the value or power to take one from the ordinary experience of the word all the way to union with the Divine.

### The First Stage

The first and prerequisite step is the purging of corrupt forms from one’s everyday language. While Bhartṛhari allows that corrupt forms of words can convey meaning, spiritual merit can be attained only by the knowledge and use of the correct forms of words. This is the spiritual value of grammar. As Bhartṛhari puts it in the *Vṛtti* on I:131:

When speech is purified by the adoption of the grammatically correct forms and all obstruction in the shape of incorrect forms is removed, there results a spiritual merit which brings the experience of well-being (*abhyudaya*). This *abhyudaya* is also translated into English as “moral power” of the sort that begins to move us in the direction of identifying ourselves with the Divine.<sup>4</sup> This is the first step in the knowledge of the Word—the repeated use of grammatically correct language which generates more and more *abhyudaya* until the way is prepared through the lower levels of language (*vaikhari* and *madhyamā vāk*) for the dawning of the mystical vision (*paśyanti*).

For the modern mind it is hard to imagine just how the factual grammatically correct use of words could be understood as generating moral power, spiritual well-being and the dawning of the mystical vision. In order to empathize with this first step in the knowledge of the Word, an excursus to explain how Bhartṛhari understands the function of time (*Kāla*) in relation to the correct use of words may prove helpful. The appearance of the unitary Divine Word (*Sabdabrahman*), as having parts (words) and sequence (word order) is the work of Time.<sup>5</sup> The entire universe is like a puppet show and Time is its wire-puller, says Bhartṛhari. Time regulates the universe through prevention or decay (*pratibandha*) and permission (*abhyanuṅnā*).<sup>6</sup> Time controls the birth, death and sequence of all objects including all words. Time allows some things to appear at a particular time and prevents others from appearing. As the sequencing activity of all experience, time translates into Grammar as the rules by which the appearance and disappearance of words in correct linguistic sequence is to take place. Underlying all activity, including all linguistic activity is the driving impulse of Time.<sup>7</sup> Time, as the first power of the Divine Word, remains eternal although the activity of language may come and go.<sup>8</sup>

Incorrect word usage results from attempts by humans to change the sequencing of language to suit themselves, without regard for the Divine Word—use of the facts of language without regard for their inherent value. Such ego-centered word use leaves behind memory traces (*saṁskāras*) which serve to conflict and obscure the proper sequencing of *Sabdabrahman* by its Time power (*Kāla*). Without the aid of grammar, and its purifying rules, such a confused mental state is the usual result. The truth of the Vedic teaching and glimpses of *Sabdabrahman* are obscured within consciousness by the layers of *saṁskāras* from incorrect word-use. Strict adherence to Grammar, and its teaching of correct word-use, gradually results in removal of these obscuring *saṁskāras* from consciousness. As the proper, non ego-centered sequencing of language is established, the truth of the

Vedic teaching can be seen and responded to. Then increased moral power and the first glimpses of the Divine Word are experienced. This is the truly creative function of the Word—not the making of something new by human ego-centered activity (the modern Western notion of creativity), but the revelation of the real nature of things through the reflective power of language.<sup>9</sup> Only when the rules of grammar are followed is word use crystalline enough to let the ultimate value—the Divine—show through. Repeated practice of proper word-use restores to language its mirror-like quality enabling a reflection of the transcendent Word to take place. Such a polishing and purification of the mind and its constituent word structures is the goal of stage one in the knowledge of the Word.

### The Second Stage

Stage two occurs when the purified reflective power of the word is focused upon until union with *Sabdabrahman* is realized. Bhartrhari describes the process in the *Vṛtti* on *Vākya-padīya* I:131.

“After taking his stand on the word which lies beyond the activity of breath, after having taken rest in oneself by the union resulting in the suppression of sequence,”

“After having purified speech and after having rested it on the mind, after having broken its bonds and made it bond-free.”

“After having reached the inner light, he with his knots cut, becomes united with the Supreme Light.”<sup>10</sup>

The middle passage should be taken first. Speech has been purified (Stage One) until the mind is functioning using only correct grammatical structures. This is what the phrase “resting it on the mind” implies. The purging of ego-attachment is essential in such a purification, and must be carried even further in Stage Two. The “breaking of bonds” referred to are the *saṁskāras* or memory traces and their tainted motivations left by egocentric activity—in either spoken words (*vaikharī vāk*) or inner thoughts (*madhyamā vāk*). These ego bonds are removed by meditating on the Divine Word (*Sabdabrahman*) so the purified forms of language are being clearly reflected. The amount of such meditation required will be equal to the strength needed to negate the egocentric *saṁskārās* stored up within the mind.

The first passage emphasizes the need for “suppression of sequence.” The function of Time (*Kāla*), in sequencing the Divine Word into thoughts and uttered sounds, must now be suppressed. While such sequencing of language is essential in ordinary day to day activities, as well as in the understanding of the Vedic teaching, there comes a time when all that must be left behind. Immersion in worldly life as a student or householder, while necessary and good in itself, is

not the ultimate value. Study of the Vedic texts, while necessary, is not to be clung to as if it were the final end. Attachment to language use in either of these areas is only indicative of a failure to go beyond ego. Especially damaging is ego attachment to the Vedic words themselves—a textual literalism or fundamentalism which reminds one of a line from T.S. Eliot’s play *Murder in the Cathedral*: “To do the right deed for the wrong reason is the greatest sin.”<sup>11</sup> Spiritual pride is always tragic, and spiritual pride attached to the Divine Word is especially so. The Grammarian practice of *Sabdapūrvayoga* (knowledge of the word) guards against such a result by insisting that the sequenced word of scripture be allowed to carry one beyond itself to union with the Divine. This will undoubtedly be the most difficult obstacle for the Grammarian yogi to overcome. After having honed his grammatical style and knowledge of scripture to a fine edge, it will be difficult to let go of that laboriously won achievement. But that is exactly what Bhartṛhari requires, otherwise the *saṁskāra* of ego attachment to the uttered word will block out the reflection of the Divine in it.

Giving up attachment to sequenced language, purified though it may be, implies moving to ever higher values—from spoken words (*vaikharī*) and inner thoughts (*madhyamā*) to the direct mystical vision (*paśyantī*, *pratibhā* or *sphoṭa*). As the first passage indicates the function of breath here is important. In *vaikharī* breath is very active in producing the sequence of uttered sounds. At the level of inner thought (*madhyamā*) breath is still active though in a more subtle way in fashioning sequences of thought. *Paśyantī* lies beyond the activity of breath and sequence.<sup>12</sup> The mind is quiet and focused allowing the *pratibhā* perception of *Sabdabrahman*. Thus, through *śabdapūrvayoga*, we are to pass on from the gross sequence to subtle sequence and finally to that stage where sequence is entirely eliminated. Like a perfectly still pond, consciousness, when stilled from its sequencing activity, clearly reflects the reality before it. For Bhartṛhari, it is the Divine Word (*Sabdabrahman*), the ultimate value, the essence of consciousness, which stands revealed at the centre of the stilled mind.

Passage three reflects just such an experience:

“After having reached the inner light, he, with his knots cut, becomes united with the Supreme Light.”

Although the “cutting of the knots” is not defined by Bhartṛhari, Vṛṣabha describes it as a cutting of the bonds and knots of “ego-sense.” Going beyond the ego-sense of “I” and “mine” is obviously a major challenge in *śabdapūrvayoga*. It is repeatedly mentioned by Bhartṛhari. For example in the *Vṛtti* on VPI: 130 he says that those who have

knowledge of the Word break the knots of ego-sense and are merged with the Divine Word. If ego attachment in any form remains, the *paśyanti* stage will not be fully realized. In the *Vṛtti* on 1:142 *paśanti* seems to be endowed with a number of phases (of increasingly pure reflection). In the lowest it seems to be still echoing some of the faint sequencing activity of *madhyamā*. At a higher level it assumes a quality in which all word-forms are submerged beyond recognition. At the highest level it completely transcends all associations with word-forms. Hence *paśyanti* can reflect worldly word-forms and can also totally transcend them. Even though it may come into contact with the sequenced and often egocentric word-forms of *vaikharī* and *madhyamā*, it remains pure, untouched, and spiritual in nature. To those who are trapped in ego-knots and impure word usage, *paśyanti* may appear to be mixed up and contaminated. But in reality it is not. As one adopts correct word forms, through a rigorous and reverent study of Grammar, one's consciousness is purified and the true inner vision of *paśyanti* revealed. As Bhartṛhari puts it: those whose inner vision is unobstructed (with ego knots) see, without error, the power of words, and know the true value of things.<sup>13</sup> The word-forms are seen for what they are, namely, partial manifestations of the one Divine Word which in *paśyanti* stands clearly revealed. *Sabdapūrvayoga* is the meditational exercise in which the mind is concentrated on the unity of the Divine Word, and turned away from the diversity of thoughts and sounds that manifest it.<sup>15</sup> Gaurinath Sastri suggests that the whole meditational process with its culmination in the vision of the Divine Word and final reunion with it is poetically described in the *Rgveda* stanza: *Maho devo martyān āviveśa*.

The spiritual aspirant reaches the Essence of Speech—the pure luminous Eternal Verbum, which lies beyond the vital plane (*prāṇavṛttim atikrānte*) by withdrawing his mind from external nature (*ātmānaṁ saṁhṛtya*) and fixing it up on his inner nature (*ātmani*). This entails the dissolution of temporal sequence of thought activity (*krama-saṁhārayogena*). The purification of the Verbum results from this and the aspirant enters into it having severed all his ties with the material objective plane. This leads him to the attainment of the internal light and he becomes identical with the undying and undecaying Spirit, the Word Absolute.<sup>16</sup> Bhartṛhari claims that in the spirituality attained through the practice of *śabdapūrvayoga* a greater measure of Divine Light shines through: “Those persons in whom correct speech exists in a greater measure, in them also resides in a greater measure, the holy form of the Creator.”<sup>17</sup> And as long as a Grammarian in the state of spirituality is alive, the Divine Light of the Word resides in him or her as in a covered vessel. When such a one dies this holy lustre merges into *Sabdabrahman*, its source.<sup>18</sup>

*Sabdapūrvayoga* demonstrates that the meaningfulness of words is not merely factual, it is a meaningfulness which has spiritual value. With the proper practice, words have the power to remove ignorance (*avidyā*), reveal truth (*dharma*) and realize release (*mokṣa*). *Vākya-pādīya* I:5 *Vṛtti* states it clearly: "Just as making gifts, performing austerities and practising continence are means of attaining heaven. It has been said: When, by practising the Vedas, the vast darkness is removed, that supreme, bright, imperishable light comes into being in this very birth."<sup>19</sup> It is not only this lofty value of final release that is claimed for the spiritual power of words, but also the very availability of human reasoning. Without the fixed power of words to convey meaning, inference through words could not take place.<sup>20</sup> Because of the power inherent in *mantras* for both human inference and divine truth, great care must be given to the knowledge of words.

In word yoga, the repeated chanting of *mantras* is an instrument of power. The more difficulties (*sāmskāras*) there are to be overcome the more repetitions are needed. *Vākya-pādīya* I:14 makes clear the repeated use of correct *mantras*, removes all impurities, purifies all knowledge and leads to release. The psychological mechanism is described by Bhartṛhari as a holding of the *sphoṭa* in place by continued chanting. Just as from a distance, or in semi-darkness, it takes repeated cognition of an object before one sees it correctly, so also repeated chanting of the *mantra* results in the *sphoṭa* being perceived in all its fullness.<sup>21</sup> Maṇḍana Miśra describes it as a series of progressively clearer impressions until a clear and correct apprehension takes place in the end.<sup>22</sup> To begin with such *mantra* chanting will be mainly at the *vaikharī* or outer word level. But as spiritual improvement is made the chant will be more and more internalized on the *madhyama* or inner word level. Eventually all sequenced chanting activity will submerge into the still steady *mantra samādhi* of *paśyanti*, and the final goal of *śabdapūrvayoga* will have been realized.

For the Hindu Grammarian then our outer words and inner thoughts are but reflections, more or less perfect, of the one Divine Word. The Great *Ṛsis* or seers recognized this and made themselves empty channels through which the Divine Word could reverberate with little distortion. The great Grammarian teachers, basing themselves on the utterances of the *Ṛsis*, formulated this wisdom into a teaching informing all of life, and even into a pathway to final liberation.

While not all may agree with the spiritual vision of the Hindu Grammarians it must be conceded that we do find here a view of language which makes sense of poetry, revealed scripture, science, the mystical chanting of *mantras*, and which, in addition, strongly reson-

ates with our ordinary every-day experience of coffee-cup chat. It is a way of seeing language which effectively explains why it is that sometimes when we listen we do not hear. It also teaches how to remove the obstructions in one's consciousness so that real hearing of the implicit values becomes possible, and suggests in a different way the ultimate wisdom, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

### Conclusion

A major contribution of Indian thought to modernity is its emphasis on the intimate unity between fact and value in all fields of knowledge. Whether it is our desperate struggle for values with which to guide the use of our science and technology, the search for ethical values in our application of new medical breakthroughs or the awareness that our use of words has ultimate value, Indian thought has important wisdom to offer. Its essence is to teach us that nothing is neutral or meaningless, but that every act, every thought has a value. There are no disconnected facts. All of us whether scientists, social scientists or artists have a moral responsibility for what we say and do. Explicitly and implicitly everything has a value. There are no free rides. At its base this Indian understanding of the relationship between fact and value is nothing more than an exegesis upon the ancient Indian notion of *karma*. Everything we do or think leaves karmic seeds or memory traces which predispose similar actions or thoughts again in the future. Taking the example of word-use, on which we have focused, our modern approach to language as conventional has led us to devalue our scriptures and our ordinary use of words. Following the lead of our Biblical Scholars, who for the past two centuries have focused on scripture as "fact" (said by whom, when and where), we have lost touch with the values that such words were created to convey. No longer are the words of the Bible God's word, but now human literature. The scholars have taken the Christian Scripture, analyzed its factual nature brilliantly, and handed it back to the believers as factually explained but bereft of the power to transform one's consciousness—the power that comes from knowing the ultimate value of the word as being God's voice.

For me personally, re-learning from Bhartṛhari the intimate connection between fact and value in language has enabled me to rediscover the transforming power of my own Christian Scripture. As a scholar it has led me to realize that everything I say or do has moral value or disvalue. To follow the selfish tendencies of my own ego will lead away from the good and toward destruction. But holding fast to the values inherent in all knowledge can lead us to clear understanding between



each of us as human beings and, on a higher level, ultimately to union with the Divine. This is equally true whether we be artists, scholars, business people or just ordinary individuals. What we say or do has a karmic value that, in the end, is of ultimate importance.

## NOTES

1. M. Hiriyana, "Philosophy of Values" in *The Spirit of Modern India*, ed. by R. McDermott and V. Naravane. New York: Thomas Crowell, 1974, p. 68.
2. Harold Coward, "The Religious Significance of Language" in *Mosaic*, XIII, 1980, pp. 91-102.
3. K. A. Subramanian Iyer, *Bharṭṛhari*, Poona: Deccan College, 1969, p. 58.
4. Gaurinath Sastri, *A Study in the Dialectics of Sphoṭa*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980, p. 82.
5. Vākapadīya III:9:46.
6. Vākapadīya III:9:4.
7. Vākapadīya III:9:74.
8. For a full analysis of the function of Time see Harold Coward, "Time (*Kāla*) in Bharṭṛhari's *Vākapadīya*," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 10, 1982, pp. 277-287.
9. Klaus Klostermaier, "The Creative Function of the Word" in "*Language*" In *Indian Philosophy and Religion*, ed. by Harold G. Coward. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1976, p. 6.
10. *The Vākapadīya of Bharṭṛhari with the Vṛtti*, trans. by K. A. Subramania Iyer. Poona: Deccan College, 1965, p. 119.
11. T. S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*. London: Faber and Faber, 1955, p. 44.
12. Vākapadīya I:142 with *Vṛtti*.
13. Vākapadīya I:143, *Vṛtti*. See also V.P. I:14.
14. Vākapadīya I:142 with *Vṛtti*.
15. Vākapadīya I:14.
16. Gaurinath Sastri, *A Study In The Dialectics of Sphoṭa*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980, p. 85.
17. Vākapadīya I:120 *Vṛtti*.
18. Vākapadīya I:120 *Vṛtti*.
19. Vākapadīya I:5 and 14.
20. Vākapadīya I:137.
21. Vākapadīya I:89.
22. *Sphoṭasiddhi of Maṇḍana Miśra*, trans. by K. A. Subramania Iyer. Poona: Deccan College, 1966, *kārika* 19-20.