CHAPTER SEVEN

The concept of Nāda or Dhvani in Grammatical system

The important contribution of the Grammarians, to the subject of my thesis, consists in distinguishing ‘Nāda’ from ‘Dhvani’. All along, we have seen that the thinkers were using ‘Dhvani’ and ‘Nāda’ in the sense of sound, as synonyms, but different only from ‘śabda’, used in the sense of ‘word’. But the Grammarians put the concept of ‘Nāda’ and ‘Dhvani’ to further scrutiny so as to ascertain the subtle shades of the connotations of the two expressions.

‘Vyākaraṇa’ is defined by Patañjali as “The science of words” (śabdānuśāsanaṃ).1 ‘Words’, here, stand for both Vedic and colloquial. The object of such science is to avoid the vulgar or corrupt words.

Unlike other countries India has produced a galaxy eminent grammarians who have made a great contribution on different aspects of Grammar, particularly on ‘semantics’. The most eminent amongst them were Pāṇani (5th Cen. B.C.), Kātyāyana (3rd Cen.B.C.), Patañjali (150 B.C.), Bhārtṛhari (400 A.D.), Bhaṭṭoji (1600 A.D.), Nāgoji Bhaṭṭa (1650), Nāgēsa Bhaṭṭa (1670 A.D.) etc.1b However Bhārtṛhari was the first grammarian who extensively dealt with the philosophical analysis of grammar. Hence I propose rely heavily on Bhārtṛhari’s Vākyapādiyam, mainly as translated by Korada Subrahmanyam,1c in addition to Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali, in order to ascertain the Philosophy of Nāda according to grammarians.

The Transcendent Reality, according to Bhārtṛhari, is the beginningless and endless (anādi) Śabdabrahman, who, being the cause of phonemes (akṣara), is of the nature of the essence of word (śabda) and from whom the entire creation emanates.2 According to
Bhartrhari, almost all Indian (schools), accepted without any contradiction, that God’s creation (ie. the Ultimate Reality) is capable of being grasped through one word, that is in the form of “Prāṇava” (“Aum”). By virtue of His Time-power (kālaśakti), Brahman becomes the source of manifold transformations (vikāra). In other words, time is the source of present, past and future and the seasons, etc. Bhartrhari’s Kāla (Time) is of the nature of Śakti and his Brahman is of the nature of Śabdrabraham.

Like Patanjali, Bhartrhari also emphasizes ‘Cosmic Consciousness’ (saṃvit) as the essence of the reality which enables the inner consciousness of the soul to understand it, in the form of word and language. For instance, according to Bhartrhari, “The speech (or word) exists within and outside all living beings in the form of consciousness (Caitanya). Śabda is another form of ‘caitanyā’ or consciousness.

For Bhartrhari and other grammarians, Śabdās are the sole guide to the objects. All classes of things depend on śabda, Vaidik or secular; and all the disciplines of knowledge depend on Vyākaraṇa (grammar). Without grammar, the truth cannot be apprehended. In a nut shell, ‘The grammar is the gateway and royal road to liberation.

The undifferentiated ‘Supreme Essence of Speech’ (i.e., Sphoṭa) is manifested by the Signs (cinḥāni) like ‘sounds’ or ‘script’, etc. Alphabets (akṣara), which are the antecedent of speech, arise out of ‘signs’. (Va.1.20-). (as translated by Korada Subrahmanyam). But as per, the translations of K.Raghavan Pillai such alphabets arise out of ‘one letter scripture’. In this view of the matter it is clear that Bhartrhari’s śabda, in metaphysical terms, arises out of Vedic ‘Vāk’ or Vedic ‘Om’ which, in the ultimate analysis, are two aspects of one and the same Brahman. On the phenomenal side, the same is reflected in the manifestation ‘syllables’ through Sound or ‘dhvani’. As V. Krishnamacharya put it, ‘Dhvani is an air-borne sound that
manifests syllables’ (dhvanir vayurguno varna vyajaka”), and ‘varṇa is a letter-substance manifested by sound” (“varṇastu dravyam, dhvanivyaṇgyam”). The high tone and low tone, etc., are the characteristic of sound; and a varṇa or a ‘letter-sound’, like ‘a’, is the one is manifested by sound. In fact, varṇa (letter sound) is nothing but a ‘sound - form’ used in the languages —Vedic or non-Vedic. A word is a group of letter-sounds. “Hence it is sound that is a word” (tasmād dhviniḥ śabdaḥ —Patañjali). Here Patañjali accepts Shabarabhāṣya on Mīmāsāsūtra, which commenting on Mi.Sū, 1.15 says - “In the day to day transaction of the world, the ‘ear-perceptible-word’, is in the form of ‘syllable-form-group-sounds’ (varṇarūp-pada-dhvani-samūha) is accepted’ (‘loke vyavahartṛṣu prasiddhaḥ śrotrendriyagrāhāhyatvād varṇarūpadhvani samūha eva śabda ityarthāḥ’ —1.1.5) 

The Meaning of a word is revealed by the object (dravya —i.e. cow) for which the word (cow) is a symbol (saṃjña). To the question - “what is word (śabda) in ‘gauḥ’? Patañjali replied by saying : “That is a word which when uttered (uccaritena) brings us a knowledge of the individuals possessing dewlap, tail, hump, hoofs and horns. In other words, ‘the sounds which conventionally convey a particular sense, is called a word’. 

Commenting on the definition of word as ‘tasmād dhvani śabdaḥ’ of Patañjali, Surendranath Dasgupta says, “the word ‘uccāritena’ has been interpreted by Kaiyaṭa not as ‘pronounced’ but as ‘expressed’ (prakāśitena). According to the grammarians, the denoting entity is something different from the alphabet constituting the word (pada) or a sentence (vākya).They argue that, if the letter-sounds individually denote the object then the pronunciation of the other letter-sounds constituting the word would be unnecessary. If each letter-sound has a meaning then they jointly cannot produce the unified meaning —the cow. If it is held that the manifestation
(abhivyakti) of the meaning takes place in succession, then as the letter-sounds vanish each moment that they are produced, it has to be admitted that the combination of different letter-sounds contributing to the final manifestation takes place on the basis of memory;.... It is for this reason the grammarians admit the existence of a separate transcendent whole called the ‘sphoṭa”. The word (pada), with its own meaning, is entirely different from the ‘varṇas’.

The word ‘varṇa’ referred to here is a ‘lettered –sound’ (or ‘syllable’) (varṇāṭmaka dhvani) different from an inarticulate sound ‘nādāṭmaka dhvani’ (sound or noise). An inarticulate sound may be regulated like in instrumental music or unregulated like a noise on a railway platform. But an articulated sound, on the other hand, is regulated, and uttered sound, to signify a particular letter (varṇa), in a particular ‘sound form’; say ‘a’, la, ma, etc. Though with certain differences, as to the nature of voices, or intonations, all people utter varṇa ‘a’ ‘la’ or ‘ma’ etc.’ in definite ‘sound-forms’. Some scholars describe this kind of particular ‘articulatory sound form’, as ‘phoneme’ (or ‘phonematic sound’), or ‘varṇa’ in Sanskrit. These varṇas (phonemes) in different combinations constitute different words. It is to be noted that in our day-to-day communications we utter a ‘sound-forms-patterns’ (morpheme), or word by uttering it through mouth as ‘ghaṭa’. Thus from time immemorial ‘sound’ is being used as a sign (‘cihna’) in languages.

A sign means ‘a mark, token, something that indicates a fact, quality, etc.; indication; token; ‘black as a sign of mourning’, etc (Webster’s New World Dictionary (electronic C.D.). A ‘sound form’ or syllable ‘gha’ is a sign (cihna) that can be used in different combinations. For example, ‘gha’ with another sound sign ‘t̄a’ becomes ‘ghaṭa’. A ‘sound-form-pattern’ (or in simplified form ‘sound-pattern’) ‘ghaṭa’ or a ‘writing-ghaṭa’ as a sign-pattern would be meaningless ‘sound’ or ‘script’, left to itself. In other words, dhvani, (inarticulate sound) standing by itself, is meaningless sound,
as Kayyāta, puts it “nādō’rtharahitatvād ghosamātrameva” (Sound by itself being without meaning is mere shouting only (ghoṣamātrameva). But as per the Sanskrit linguistic tradition (or convention), this ‘sound-sign’ ‘ghaṭā’ indicates or refers to a pot. That means a ‘sound sign’ ‘ghaṭā’, when it is always taken for ‘pot’, becomes a ‘sound-symbol’ (samjña) for the ‘pot’. Symbol means ‘something that stands for, represents, or suggests another thing; - the ‘dove’ is a symbol of peace’. In other words, this ‘sound-sign (cihna)- ‘ghaṭā’ becomes a ‘sound-symbol (samjña) or ‘word’ for ‘pot’ as per the Sanskrit – linguistic tradition, (but not in any other language). In the words of Bhartrhari, “The signs (cihnāni) (of sound) of Prākṛtadhvani (i.e. ‘katva’ and ‘gatva’, for example) which are like the script-signs shine forth like reflections (of Sphoṭa or meaning) in association with Śabda antecedent to all speech”. In other words, a ‘sign’, with meaning becomes, symbol or word. For instance, even in the case of a nouns, “before the name becomes connected with the named (as samjña), such name is connected with its own form as the meaning (artha) (in the form of the named)”.

According to Bhartrhari, all the words are situated in ‘prākṛtadhvani’. But a person, observing a vow of silence (mauni), may indicate the word ‘ghaṭā’ in the ‘script-form’ (lipi) by writing - ‘ghaṭā’ (sign) on a paper so as to serve as a symbol (for ghaṭa) to indicate the object ‘ghaṭa’. Such a ‘script-form’ is described by some scholars as ‘grapheme’. Here the script is used as a substituted sign for the ‘uttered-sound-word’ -’ghaṭa’. There is also a ‘short-hand’ script used as substituted sign for the ‘long-hand’ script. Similarly, a gesture language (communicating by bodily movements) used by deaf and dumb persons is also a substituted sign for spoken words. For example, a deaf and dumb person may indicate ‘two’ in ‘visual sign’ by raising two fingers pointing them at the pots to indicate two ‘ghaṭas’. Though the Grammarians discuss ‘dhvani’ (Sound) as an
important element in constituting a 'word' yet they treat it as a manifestor (vyanjaka) of 'sphota' or meaning. An 'uttered sound word', as a sign, assumes the status of a symbol (saṃjña), when it conveys some meaning (by referring to an object) according to convention. The symbol in the form of word (ghāta), and the object (ghaṭa) go together. "The said two aspects of Šabda (word), viz., 'grāhyatva' and 'grāhakatva' which are analysed and separated by mind, act without mutual opposition as causes of different effects (like the 'saṃjña' and 'saṃjñī')." Korada Subrahmanyam clarified the verse by observing that "Saṃjña is an instrument in identifying a thing or a person. The person or thing identified is 'Saṃjñī'. For example —Rama, Bhiṣma, Nala are 'Saṃjñī'”. They are in the form of human beings”. Thus a word has three aspects: 1) sign (cihna) - uttering “sound-word” ‘cow’; 2) symbol (saṃjña)- this ‘sign’ becomes symbol (saṃjña) when it refers to an object (cow) and 3) the object cow - ‘Saṃjñī’. A ‘sound-word’ as a ‘sign’ cannot become a symbol, unless it has a referent. The referent stands for the meaning for which the symbol stands for. Thus without meaning a ‘sign’ or ‘sound-word’ (morpheme) (sound —cow) cannot become a symbol (word - cow) for the object-cow. (It is worth noticing in this context that the majority of the modern scholars take sign (cihna) and symbol (‘saṃjña’) together under ‘saṃjña’ only.)

According to the grammarians, as noted above, the meaning of the word stands for the existence of a separate transcendent whole different from pronounced letter-sounds (morphemes -words), and to this they call ‘Sphota’. According to them a word is uttered in the speaker’s mouth in a series of sounds and is heard by the listener in the form of the ‘sound series’ in the same sequence. It is also in the nature of vocal organ that it can utter only one sound at a time. It is also in the nature of a ear, that is, it can legibly hear only one sound at a time. Even if more than one sound is produced at a time, the mind selects and the ear perceives one particular sound clearly. Hence no
body can say that he or she can utter or the listener can hear all the seven ‘svaras’ (musical notes) at a given time. Therefore, according the grammarians, a word is uttered by the speaker and heard by the listener in a series of phonemes (letter sounds), in succession. Though earlier phonemes, immediately extinguish after utterance, yet it is the last phoneme that reveals the meaning of the object. Only because the earlier phonemes extinguish it cannot be said that they were useless. In fact before extinguishing they leave impressions in memory and these impressions along with previous ‘sanskāras’ [as to its particular meaning (dravya-vyakti) or universal meaning (jāti or class etc)] reveal the ‘sphoṭa’ (or meaning).

For the Grammarians, a word is primarily an ‘idea’ in the mind (in the form of ‘madhyamā’), and is expressed or suggested in words in ‘vaikhari’, in the form of ‘syllabic-sounds’ (varṇas), with the help of the articulatory organs,—such as mouth teeth, tongue, etc. It is important to note that the ‘vaikhari vāk’, according to the Grammarians is inadequate, owing to its vagaries in phonetic or sound utterances, to express the meaning conceived in ‘madyamā vāc’. Therefore, they believe that they are primarily concerned with ‘madhyamā’, which, in fact, causes ‘vaikhari’. A lamp (illuminates the object, ‘ghāṭa’ in darkness, likewise, ‘vaikhari vāk’ illuminates (or suggests or manifests) the meaning of the ‘madhyamā vāk’ hidden in the mind. Here vaikhari is vyaṅjaka (manifestor) of Madhyamā, which is vyaṅgya (manifested).18

Even for Bhartrhari also, the word (in the form of idea in mind — madhyamā) has “neither prior nor posterior nor has sequence” but “the word is produced in a sequence with the gross sound (Vaikhari) (nāda).” 19 The idea (sphoṭa) is mistaken for word only, because of its association with gross sounds, like the reflection of the moon in water. 20 It happens so, because it is through Vaikhari that the madhyamā is revealed to the listener. Even according to Nāgeśa
“sphota’ refers to the madhyama type of ‘vāk’, while ‘dhvani’ refers to the vaikhari type”. 21

Bhartrhari uses three terms to explain his theory of Vaikhari dhvani, and they are :-‘Vṛtti-sabda’, ‘dhvani’, and ‘nāda’. K.V. Subramania Ayer, by way of his comments, explains them by adding a note :- “The first stands for the word which conveys the meaning. The ‘dhvanis’ are conceived of as something atomic, all-pervasive and imperceptible. When amassed by the movements of the articulatory organs they become gross and perceptible and are then called ‘nāda’. It is this ‘nāda’ which suggests the word.” 22

According to Bhartrhari, when a ‘vaikhari word - gauḥ’ is uttered through mouth, (Vṛtti-sabda) it is uttered in ‘prākṛta dhvani’ (i.e. the one born from Prakṛti or nature- or original sound or physical sound (Dhvani) and this original sound (Dhvani) is distinguishable from ‘vaikṛta dhvani’ or ‘modified – speech- sounds’ (Nāda). Though there are other sounds like the ‘sounds (cries) of birds’, or the ‘sounds of river’, etc., yet those sounds are mere sounds, and not phonemes (varṇa). For uttering ‘ghaṭa’, the speaker utters ‘vaikhari’ or speech sounds —‘gh-a-ṭa’ which are phonemes (varṇa) and the said phonemes are heard by the listener, so as to have the sphota (or meaning) of the word -‘ghaṭa’. These phonemes are uttered in ‘prākṛta dhvani’ or the original sound. ‘Prākṛta’ means ‘that which has come out or “derived from ‘prakṛti’ original element. Thus, according to Bhartrhari, there are two types of ‘dhvanis’ -‘prākṛta dhvani’ and ‘vaikṛta dhvani’; and - this ‘prākṛta dhvani’ exists even before ‘sphoṭa’; in fact it is the ‘prākṛta dhvani’ that causes ‘sphoṭa’ and obtains plurality and the difference in ‘mātrās’ as ‘short’ (ḥṛṣva), ‘long’ (dīrgha) and ‘prolated’ (pluta) etc. in Vaikṛta-dhvani. The ‘vaikṛta dhvani’, on the other hand, are those that take place so as to continue ‘prākṛta’ dhvani with certain changes such as long and short, etc. The phonemes are uttered in ‘prākṛta’ dhvani or original or
primary sound. ‘Vaikṛta dhvanis are ‘the secondary changed-prolonged sounds (floating in the air)’ which continue the ‘prakṛta’ dhvani with certain modifications. ‘Vaikṛta means ‘modified, derivative, secondary, changed, undergoing change’ etc. For example, the word ‘vada’ (short- to speak), is in ‘prakṛti—dhvani’ (and gets modified into Vikṛtika dhvani with dīrgha (long)- as ‘vadāmi’ (I speak)- without affecting the meaning of the ‘sphoṭaśabda’ —‘vada’. In the words of Sangraha of Vyādi, an authority said to have been followed by Bhartrhari, (not traced except as excerpts in different books of grammar),:

‘Varṇasya grahaṇe hetuḥ prākṛto dhvanirīṣyate
vṛttibhede nimittatvaṁ vaikṛtaḥ prtipādyate.

“The ‘prākṛta-dhvani’ (primary sound) is the cause of the perception of the letters (varṇa), and the ‘vaikṛta-dhvani’ or the modified sound is the cause for the difference in speed of utterance (vṛtti)”26 Nāgėśa or Nāgoji Bhaṭṭa, the most outstanding after Bhartrhari, also accepted such a division of sound into Prākṛta dhvani and Vaikṛta dhvani. According to him ‘the former is the revealer of the ‘sphoṭa’, whereas the latter is produced from the former and keeps it (to be heard by the listener) and is responsible for such modification of the sound as to the speed of utterance (vṛtti).27 I pause here to emphasize the fact that the ‘Sound’ that is described as ‘vaikṛta dhvani’ or ‘Nāda’, is the hero, that is, the focal point, of my thesis.

Bhartrhari leaves no stone unturned in distinguishing Prākṛtadhvani from Vaikṛtadhvani. According to him, the air, which stirred the speaker’s effort following his desire to speak, strikes the speech centers in the mouth organ, and produces different sounds.28 To this, he calls Prākṛtadhvni. The impact caused by such an effort is such that this Prākṛtadhvni produces other sounds or vibrations called Vaikṛtadhvani (or Nāda. ). These Vaikṛtadhvani (nāda) which cause
modifications (Vṛttis -druta etc) arise after the cessation of the movements (of the organs) (kampetūparate jātā nādā vṛttiviśeṣākah.  , in the form of magnified śabdas. “Even before the vibrations (kampa) of the speech-organs (which produced śabda) have subsided, the other sounds, (Vaikṛtadhvani or Nāda) are formed from the Sphoṭa itself, as from one flame to another (with the help of sticks placed.)”  Just like the fact that even after the current is switched off the fan rotates for some time more, the Vaikṛtadhvani or Nāda also continues for a longer time, after Prākṛta dhvani subsides.

According to Bhārtrhari, however, without the primary sound ‘sphoṭa’ cannot be manifested; but, at the same time, the fact remains that the primary sound is not perceptible. “….It has been pointed out that the actual sounds uttered by the speaker and heard by the listener are the ‘vaikhāri dhvani’, containing many irrelevant, idiosyncratic, and non-linguistic elements (of the utterer). This ‘Vaikhāri dhvani’ reveals the ‘prākṛta dhvani’ which is linguistically relevant phonematic pattern of utterance, free from variations of intonation, tempo, pitch, and so on, which do not affect the language. Of course in languages in which the tone or pitch or length is relevant, these factors will be part of the ‘prākṛta dhvani’ itself.”

“The phonemes, which are factors of the sound (dhvani) that reveal the sphoṭa, seem to be part of the ‘sphoṭa’…. When a man utters a sentence - “bring the pot”,… it is heard by the listener, reaches his mind through the sense organ, and reveals its meaning. As far as the speaker is concerned, the sound is produced simultaneously by the madhyāmā and the vaikhāri. To the listener, the vaikhāri helps in revealing the madhyāmā that gives ‘sphoṭa’, the meaning bearer.”

If according to Bhārtrhari what is heard is only Vaikṛta dhvani or Nāda, then a question arises: If so what happened to ‘Prākṛta dhvani’; Whether the Vaikṛta dhvani (or Nāda,secondary sound)
replaced it; or 'Prākṛta dhvani' itself got modified into Vaikṛta dhvani?

According to Bhartrhari, 'Prākṛta dhvani' is an important constituent of Vaikṛta dhvani or nāda. (But according to me, 'vaikṛta-dhvani' is the same Prākṛta dhvani, but at the time it is the one processed, modified and modulated (vaikṛta) in mouth, according to the intention of the speakers to express himself in such words as he chooses; or in the case of singing, in the svara he adopts and proposes to adopt next).

For Bhartrhari, both 'prakṛta dhvani' and 'vaikṛta dhvani' are, only the manifesters of 'sphoṭa', without being the part of 'sphoṭa'. In view of this position, among others, the grammarians maintain that 'sphoṭa' transcends 'letter-sounds' (varṇas). Therefore, phonemes (varṇas), morphemes (words) and sentences are "only a means to the apprehension of the complete śabda, i.e., 'sphoṭa'." Korada Subramanyam explains by stating that the śabda-sphoṭa is 'akhaṇḍa' (partless). He further says that "In truth the 'Sphoṭaśabda' has got no sequence. The sequence is there in Dhvanis, which manifest the 'Sphoṭa'. Such a 'dhvani' helps, in the expression of meaning. 'Otherwise, the 'śabda' cannot be grasped, nor is it capable of conveying the meaning".

From the above discussion is clear that the Sound is an important factor in the cognition of a language (śabda bodhaḥ).

What is the nature of this process of 'cognition of a word' by means of Sound?

There are three theories among those who hold that it is the primary sound (prakṛta dhvanis) that manifest sphoṭa).

a) The dhvanis refine or perfect (samskāra), the sense of hearing, for clear perception of the word. ie the sounds act upon the sense-organ.
b) The dhvanis refine the ṣabda (word), so as to enable it to become perceptible by the ear (Bauddhas), i.e., the sounds act upon ‘ṣabda’ (word).

c) The dhvanis refine both the sense of hearing and the ṣabda (word), so that the word becomes perceptible. (Naiyāyikas).

Vṛṣabha, one of the commentators of Vākyapādīyam, says in his Vṛtti, that “the perception of the sense of hearing itself in three ways:

“1) The sounds impart to the sense of hearing the power of grasping a word which was not there before.

2) The sounds only awaken the power which was already there.

3) What is called perception of the senses means the presence of sounds in the sense of hearing, favourable to its grasping the word.

“What is meant here is that the function of the Sounds, whether it be the perception of the senses of hearing or of the word, does not go beyond the totality of the factors, but is part of them, just as the light of the lamp is part of the causal factors in the perception of visual objects.”

If that is so, in this context, another question may be raised:
What is the manner in which the sound manifests ‘sphoṭa’?

There are again three theories regarding the manifestation of ‘sphoṭa’ through sound:

a) Sound is perceived along with ṣabda (word) in the manifestation of ‘sphoṭa’. Sound is the manifesting agent.

b) Sound is not perceived, but only ṣabda (word) or ‘sphoṭa’ is perceived.

c) Sound is an independent manifesting agent of the ṣabda (word) or ‘sphoṭa’.

Bhartṛhari, as I have already explained above, accepted the third theory. According to him the sound (nāda) is only a manifesting agent
(vyañjaka) of śphoṭa; and śphoṭa exists independently. Whatever may be the theory, it is not substantially disputed by the Grammarians that it is the ‘dhvani’ or sound that manifest ‘śāda’ (word) or the ‘śphoṭa’. According to Bhartṛhari, the word is manifested by the last dhvani, in the sequence of dhvanis, having regard to their intrinsic nature. These qualities of dhvani are sometimes falsely attributed to śabda (word); but śabda (word) by itself is partless.

If the word and the sound are thus different, and the word is manifested by the last sound, in sequence of sounds then another question may be raised:

What is the nature of ‘this process of the manifestation’ of the Śphoṭa by sound?

The reply of Bhartṛhari is that—

nādairāhitabījāyāmantena dhvanīnā saha
āvṛtparipākāyāṁ buddhau śabdo’avadhāryate –Vā.1.84

“Simultaneously with the last sound, the ‘śabda’ is apprehended by the mind in which the seed (impression-sanskāra) has been sown by the physical sounds, and in which ripening (maturity of speech) has been brought about.” It means that the śphoṭa is manifested along with the last sound with the help of the impressions left by previous sounds”38

If ‘Śphoṭa’, thus, is separate from dhvani, it follows that there are no parts in phonemes nor there are phonemes in word, then how to account for phonemes and words and sentences; or “Where from do ‘dhvani’ (or ‘nāda’) and śphoṭa (or meaning) get this kind of relation as the manifester and the manifested?

Bhartṛhari replies to this question as follows:

asataṣcāntarāle yān śabdānastīti manyate
pratipatturasaktiḥ sā grahaṇopāya eva saḥ
“So far as the non-existent (illusory) forms (phonemes and words, which a hearer considers as existing in interval (i.e. between the utterance of the śabda and the revealing of Sphoṭa by them) are concerned, that is merely the incapacity on the part of hearer; but they are, in fact, only a means to the apprehension (grahaṇopāya eva saḥ) (of the complete śabda, i.e. Sphoṭa).” What Bhartrhari intends to say is this that, so far the hearer (for that matter even the speaker) has no option but to follow the linguistic convention that has already determined such relation between sound and the word (i.e. phonemes as part of word and words as part of sentence) as the only means of comprehension (grahaṇopāya eva saḥ). What is intended here is that the linguistic tradition, in the course of its development, associates the relation between a word and sound. (e.g. ‘sound —gau’ =the word ‘gau’).

According to Bhartrhari, though the Sphoṭa is ‘whole’ (akhaṇḍa) without any parts yet appears to be with parts because of its association with ‘sound’, which has parts. “Such a ‘śabda (sound)’ K.Subrahmanyam states, “ is helping in the expression of meaning of the word.”.....‘Otherwise, the ‘śabda (word)’ cannot be grasped, nor is it capable of conveying the meaning”. They are inseparable like light and shadow. Hence there is always a false identity between the two, and the word is mistakenly taken as having parts, even though it is sound that has parts (like phonemes etc), but not the word. Likewise even knowledge (jñāna) which is partless appears to be in parts or in sequence, because of such illusory association between word (sphoṭa) and sound. 40

Since the ‘dhvanis’ are non-identical with each other how can they manifest their form in a śabda?

To this Bhartrhari replies : “When in reality, the revealing units in phoneme, word, and sentence function independently of each other, they appear to function in combination, although they are entirely different. Their capacities (powers -śaktayaḥ) seem to be
The power of dhvani, and its general characteristic, is such that by breaking up its own inherent bindu (granthi) through breath, it reveals through different speech-sounds, and merge into the syllables (and thus take the form of phoneme, word and sentence). Moreover "by the striking of the (air) to the organs of speech, the long and prolated sounds which are different, are produced. And the sounds which modify the Vṛtti (dhrut, etc.) (vaikṛta dhvani) arise after the cessation of the movements (of the organs)." The object of these two verses is that there is inherent power or capacity (śaktayah) with the sound, that it can take the form of syllable by diffusing its own "granthi" ('bindu') with the help of breath and cause modification in Vṛtti (dhrut, etc.) of the sound after it is produced. Korada Subrahmanyam commenting on Vā.1.105 states that the distinctive capacity of the internal air while striking speech centers in the mouth is such that it creates vibration and "Such vibration modifies in accordance with phoneme". Thus, according to Bhaṭṭoji Dīksita, there would be modification in "dhvani" which takes the form of different phonemes and subsequently in long and short sounds in Vikṛtadhvani. (But this theory of modification of sound is not accepted by Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Mīmāṃsā Schools —that will be considered in Chapter Nine.).

What is that that causes śphoṭa: Is it phoneme; a word or a sentence?

For Bhaṭṭoji Dīksita, "the experience as one word or one sentence is the basis for assuming 'padasphoṭa' and 'vākyasphoṭa'. The phonemes (varṇas) suggest 'śphoṭa', which is the meaning bearer." But Bharata Miśra, in the opinion of the Editors, "goes to the extent of denying the Varṇas by making "a clear-cut statement (not found in Bhaṭṭhari or in Maṇḍana) that it is sounds (dhvani) and..."
not the phonemes (varṇas) (though he does not say how he differentiates the two) that manifest the ‘sphoṭa’…. 

Bharata Miśra declares - “According to the Grammarians it is the sounds, and not phonemes, that manifest the ‘sphoṭa’. The sounds in the word ‘vṛṣa’ are different from the first four in the word ‘vṛṣabha’.”

Koṇḍa or Kauṇḍa Bhaṭṭa*, (according to Shivaram Dattatrya Joshi : Kauṇḍa Bhaṭṭa on the Meaning of Sanskrit Verbsen'; p.1; Saṃbhāṣā : ‘Nagoya Studies in Indian Culture and Bhuddhism’ (1993); Department of Indian Philosophy, University of Nagoya, Japan, his correct name was Kauṇḍa Bhaṭṭa), the author of ‘Vaikaraṇabhūṣaṇa’ and ‘Vaikaraṇabhūṣaṇasāra’, also maintains a position almost similar to Bharata Miśra’s - “that sounds perceived by the listeners are not different from ‘sphoṭa’. The ‘sphoṭa’ is cognized in the form of the distinctive sounds ‘g-h-a-ta’. Koṇḍa Bhaṭṭa holds the view that the object of cognition is the indivisible word- ‘sphoṭa’, but its form is nothing else than the ‘phonemes’ auditorily perceived. The phoneme ‘g’ manifested by ‘sound’ is identified with the phoneme ‘g’, which appears to be part of indivisible ‘sphoṭa’ word.”

To this argument, there was an objection — “It cannot be argued that the sound-producing air waves reveal the ‘sphoṭa’ collectively, because they are momentary, and each airwave perishes as soon as the succeeding one comes into existence..’. Koṇḍa (or Kauṇḍa) Bhaṭṭa meets this objection by saying that the sound-producing movements reveal ‘sphoṭa’ individually. A single air-wave, for instance, in the word ‘gauḥ’ reveals ‘sphoṭa’ through the medium of sound ‘g’, another reveals through the medium of sound ‘au’; and the third one reveals ‘sphoṭa’ through the medium ‘visarga (ḥ). Thus ‘sphoṭa’ is more and more clearly revealed with each succeeding air-wave. In this manner, Koṇḍa Bhaṭṭa says, the ‘sphoṭa’ word ‘gauḥ’ is revealed by an individual wave through the medium of the order or sequence of
sounds, g-au-ḥ. The different sounds are wrongly considered to be of non-different from the ‘sphoṭa’ word ‘gauḥ’.

The Naiyāyikas object to this theory by urging that the relation of immediate sequence cannot be maintained between two sounds, because the first had died out by the time the second has come into existence. The relation of priority and posterity arises only when two things exist simultaneously. There cannot be any combination of what is non-existent with what exists.

Kaunda Bhaṭṭa answers this objection - “by assuming that the combination of non-existing thing is possible in cognition. The combination can be maintained between two sounds, because at the time of the knowledge of the ‘utpatti’ (production), the knowledge of ‘stithi’ (duration) of the first sound has not died out.”

I also find that this kind of fusion of two visual perceptions, as a psychic phenomenon, is accepted in motion pictures. In motion pictures (or in cinema) different still pictures are presented to visual perception in quick succession. Before the earlier sensation is faded out (stithi) if the second sensation occurs (utpatti) in a quick succession, then the possibility of ‘fusion in sensations’ can be inferred.- in the same manner the modification and movement of pictures is experienced in cinemas. Such a fusion of ‘senses of hearing’ also can be inferred.

At any rate, for the grammarians, the phonemes and words are artificially created. The difference in the phonetic shape in revealing ‘sphoṭa’ causes the difference in the revealed ‘sphoṭa’. The phonetic shape of ‘nadī’ (river) is different from the phonetic shape of ‘dīna’ (poor), though the same phonemes are employed in these two words. For the grammarians it is the sequence of sound waves (that are artificially created) that determines their different sound-shape with different meaning, to be learnt through convention. In the words of Bharṭṛhari, “Just as there is a fixed sequence (in the stages) of the transformation of milk (in to curd) and the seed (into the tree), similarly there is a fixed sequence in the series of the hearer’s
Commenting on this verse Korada Subrahmanyam observes that “The phonemes and words are no doubt created but they have got a sequence which is consistent.” Even assuming the Mīmāṁsā theory that phones are eternal, it is sequence of phonemes that determines the meaning of the word.

Korada Subrahmanyam clearly highlighted the difference in the theories of Mīmāṁsakas and Grammarians regarding this sequencing aspect. According to the theory of Mīmāṁsakas, the phonemes for themselves do not have any sequence and the form of words like ‘ghaṭaḥ’ and ‘paṭaḥ’ has to be described in terms of the sequence of the sounds which are suggestive. Otherwise, the word manifested by each sound cannot be decided. The phonemes by themselves do not have any sequence. In case all the sounds are suggestive at a time, since there are the same phonemes in both the words - nadi and dīna -, it is not possible to differentiate between the two. Similar is the case with kapi-pika, rāja-jarā, yāma-māyā etc. Therefore, the sounds are suggestive. They are produced. They have a sequence. When the sequence is attributed to the suggested phonemes, the difference among words is established. As against this theory of Mīmāṁsakas - that the ‘sequence of sounds has nothing to do with Sphoṭa’-, Bhartrihari asserts that “due to the difference in time of the manifesting sound, their own time and that of the duration of their cognition are attributed to the phoneme (varṇa), word (pada) and sentence (vākaya) which have no difference in time.”

K.A.S. Iyer elucidated Bhartrihari’s theory of ‘time’ in relation to phonemes and words. He clarified that for Bhartrihari, the Sphoṭa is, in fact, manifested by speech sounds in the form of phonemes, words, sentence, etc., which basically are manifesting sounds with time sequences, as the first sound, the second sound, the third sound, the last sound, etc. Thus, the time factors like ‘eka-mātra, etc., is attributable to the this kind of time factors of speech sounds as being uttered in time sequence in Prākṛtadhvni (primary sound); having
regard to the result of the relative intensity of attack of the Prākṛta sound, at the speech centers in the mouth, after cessation of that Prākṛta sound, the secondary sound vibrations (kampa) of Vaikṛtadhvani take different forms (vṛtti) as short (druta), long (dīrgha), etc. (Vā.1.105). These time factors in manifesting sounds are reflected in the Sphoṭa. Otherwise, they (these time factors) do not belong to the Sphoṭa at all. Moreover, these time factors of manifesting sounds make the speech sounds perishable and non-eternal. But the sphaṭa by itself is separate and eternal. Some people consider Sphoṭa as non-eternal by associating it with manifesting phonemes, etc., which are non-eternal. But a Grammarian being primarily concerned with the scientific study of language, has to sympathize with, and take into account, all the theories expressed by the learned people.

It appears, thus, that there are divergent opinions regarding the eternity or otherwise of Sphoṭa. If it is so, then, what is the final verdict of the Grammarians —Is Sphoṭa eternal or non-eternal?

According to the Grammarians, from the point of view of the intellectuals (uttmādhikārins) like Patañjali, Sphoṭa is eternal. But to accommodate the non-intellectuals (madhyamādhikārins), grammarians, have some times, accommodated the second theory that the Sphoṭa being caused in vocal organs, is non-eternal. (‘Kāryaśabdavāda’). At any rate, according to them, the eternity of Sphoṭa is attributable to the eternity of the relation between the ‘śabda’ or word and its ‘artha’ or meaning. The śabda, in this sense, is the sole cause of all the transaction in the world. In the words of Bhartrhari - “The power which is based on the śabda (śabdeṣu āśritā śaktiḥ) is the cause of (all transactions) in this universe. The universe which has a single intuition (pratibhā) as its soul, (but) is perceived as manifold through the śabda as the eye.”52 In other words, this relation between word and its meaning is of the type of Vācyā (the object) and Vācaka (the word), on the basis of ‘sanskāra’ of the last birth, and the
linguistic convention in this birth, as grasped by one’s Pratibhā (intuition). The child on its birth sucks the milk without being taught, and learns the words quickly when taught due to the ‘sanskāra’ of the last birth. Nevertheless, the expression of thought, in this life has become possible only through words. “It is seen that the distinction between two things, for instance, between śaḍja and another musical note, (Niśāda, ṛṣabha, Gāndhāra, śaḍja, Madhyama, Dhaivata, and Pañcama), becomes clear when explained only through śabda. Therefore, the manner of things is determined only through śabdas”54 Those, who are versed in Vedas, know that this Universe is the transformation of Speech,”55 on the basis of the ‘Nāma-Rūpa’ principle.

The speech exists within and outside all living beings in the form of consciousness (Caitanyam) and it is preceded by speech.56 “In this world no knowledge is possible except as accompanied by śabda. All branches of knowledge of Arts and Craft, etc., are possible only through śabda.57

It is the speech that is employed while transferring one’s knowledge to others.58 It is this speech that prompts the human beings in different actions or deeds.59 It is this very speech that acts as an agent, in connection with an object and its meaning.60 Even the Tarka-śastra (logic) adopts words and sentences in its reasoning and conclusions. Thus, “The human reasoning is the power of śabda. The reasoning which is given by the persons, who do not respect the power of Sabda, or which is against the power of śabda cannot be authentic in deciding the purport of a śabda (a sentence, or a text etc.).”61

It is also the thesis of Bhartrhāri (just like that of Patañjali), that ‘those desirous of salvation or upliftment (abhuyadaya) should employ correct words’.62, with the threefold speech,- Paśyantī, Madhyamā and Vaikhary, in three places - Udātta, Anudātta, and Svarita” correctly.63 Therefore, all types of knowledge (due to
perception, inference, etc.,) shines as permeated by speech". ("jīnānam sarvam śabdena bhāsate"). Thus, for Bhartrhari, speech is the only epistemological means both for worldly knowledge and for the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality.

The gist of the theory in Grammatical System:-

‘Nāda is an artificial sound produced by Vaikhari Dhvani of vocal chord (Positivistic theory of Sound).

According to a Grammarian Philosopher, like Bhartrhari, the Transcendental Reality is eternal Shabdabrahman, the cause of phonemes and the essence of word (Vāk), and who can be grasped through one word in the form of Prāṇava (Om). In metaphysical terms, his concept of ‘śabda’ (word) is a manifestation of Cosmic Consciousness in the form of union of Om (Cosmic Sound) and Cosmic Vāk. On the phenomenal side, as explained by Nāgeśa Bhāṭṭa, "...dhvani is an air-born sound and varṇa is a letter manifesting sound". The high and low tone, etc., are the characteristic of sound (dhvani); whereas varṇa is a ‘letter-sound’ like ‘a’, which is the only one, that is manifested by a particular sound (form). In other words, ‘a’-varṇa (syllable) is a ‘particular sound form’ different from ‘i’-varṇa another sound ‘form’.

Though the Grammarians discuss ‘dhvani’ (sound) as an important constituent of a word, still only as an ‘artificial’ manifesting agent (vyañjaka) of ‘meaning’. For the Grammarians, a ‘separate transcendent whole’ is different from the letter-sounds (varṇas) in ‘Vaikhāri-dhvani’ and to this they call ‘sphoṭa’ (equated to the essence of Brahman)
According to Bhartrhari, there are two kinds of sounds: one ‘physical original sound’ (prakṛta dhvani) and the other, ‘syllabic-articulate modulated sound’ (vaikṛta dhvani). It is this modified or modulated sound (vaikṛta dhvani), which Bhartrhari calls ‘Nāda’, and I have accepted his theory. According to his theory, there is a modification (vikāra) of sound in its application, as a means of human language. But the theory of ‘modification of Sound’ is denied by Mimāṃsakas and Naiyāyika. I will discuss this aspect shortly.

According to Grammarians, the sound is non-eternal, but the relation between the word and its meaning, based on convention, is eternal, and on the basis of this the eternality of relation between ‘word’ and its ‘meaning’, as determined by convention, the eternality of the Veda can be established.

Notes and References

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1b Shivaram Dattatrya Joshi: *Kaṇḍa Bhaṭṭa on the Meaning of Sanskrit Verbs*; Saṃbhāṣā : ‘Nagoya Studies in Indian Culture and Buddhism’ (1993); Department of Indian Philosophy, University of Nagoya, Japan.

1c Korada Subramanyam,: *Vākyapādiyam of Bhartrhari* (Brahmakāṇḍa) (with Eng.Tr) (1992); Sri Satguru Publications, Delhi-110007),

2 Vāk.1.1
3 Vāk.1.9
4 Vāk.1.3
5 Vāk.1.126
6 Vāk.1.13
7 Vāk.1.14 &16
8 Vāk.1.

10 Krishnamacharya (ed): *Sphoṭavāda of Nāgeśa Bhāṭṭa*; in Introduction’ at p.6; (1977); The Adyar Library and Research Centre, Madras-600020).


11a (see ibid., p.4.)

12 Surendranath Dasgupta — ‘*The Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali*’, at p. 6 (1991); Pub: Indian Council of Philosophical Research — New Delhi-110002.).


14 *Webster’s New World Dictionary*— electronic C.D.

15 Vāk.1.20 -Tr.KS—with my own modifications

16 Vāk.1.66

17 Vāk.1.58

18 [See Korada Subramanyam at p. 29-30].

19 Vāk.1.48

20 Vāk.1.49

21 Raghavan, V.K.S.N. (Tr) “*Mahābhāṣyaprādīpodyota of Nāgeśa*.” The Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies Vol. V. p.340

22 K.A.Subramania Iyer: *The Vākyapadīya of Bhartṛhari with Vṛtti*; 1965) (p.55.); Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute, Poona -6)


24 (Vāk.1.46-47 and 1.76-77 )


26 K.Kunjunni Raja: *Indian Theories of meaning; Sangraha of Vyādi Tr. p.101; (1977);The Adyar Library and Research Centre, Adyar, Madras-20)

27 Kunjunni Raja: *Paramalaghumaṇijūṣā of Nāgeśa or Nāgoji Bhaṭṭa*
The Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies (Vol.V —p.329).

28 Vāk.1.108
29 Vāk.1.105
30 Vāk.1.106


33 Vāk.1.85 (Korada Subramanyam —p.57.).

34 Vāk.1.78

34a (See Viśabha : Viśti — Commentary of Vākyapādiyam -Tr.K.A. Subramania Ayer (p.81).

35 Vāk.1.81
36 Vāk.1.88
37 Vāk.1.93
38 Vāk.1.84 -Tr K.S
39 Vāk.1.85 - (Tr. Korada Subrahmanya at p.57).
40 Vāk.1.86
41 Vāk.1.88 —Tr. Korada Subrahmanyam — at p.59, -).

42 Note: the word “saṅkīrṇā” 1) means mixed together, intermingled, 2) Confused, miscellaneous; 3) Shattered, spread, crowded etc. (Apte: *The Practical Sanskrit- English Dictionary*; p.946).

43 Vāk.1.115.
44 Vāk.105
45 Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita — ’Śabdakaustubha’ - (Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies; Vol V. p.242).
47 ibid., p.233
48 a ibid.,p.303
49 ibid., p. 303-304
50 Vāk.1.91
51  Tr. K.A.S. Iyer Vāk. 1.101 -at p.97
52  Vāk. 1. 118 -Tr. Korada Subramanyam
53  Vāk.1.121
54  Vāk. 1.119
55  Vāk.1.120
56  Vāk.1.126).
57  Vāk. 1.125
58  Vāk. 1.124
59  Vāk.1.127
60  Vāk.1.128
61  Vāk 1.138 —Tr. Korada S.
62  Vāk 1.140
63  Vāk 1.143 -Tr. K. Subr.
64  Vāk 1.123
65  Vāk.1.132