A COMPARATIVE ACCOUNT OF
BHARTRHARI'S
SPHOTA THEORY AND F.D SAUSSURE'S
THEORY OF SIGN

Sreekumar M. “A comparative study of Sphota theory of language and F.D. Saussures theory of sign” Department of Philosophy, University of Calicut, 1998
CHAPTER - IV

A COMPARATIVE ACCOUNT OF BHARTRHARI'S SPHOTA THEORY AND F.D SAUSSURE'S THEORY OF SIGN

"...It is no longer sufficient merely to go back over the christian and European cultural traditions. The horizons of the world are no longer confined to Europe and America. We have to gain new perspectives, and on this our spiritual and even our physical survival depends..."

T. Merton, Mystics and Zen Masters.

ONE

Before discussing the comparisons and the contrasts between Bhartrhari and Saussure, it is important to arrive at a clear meaning of the term comparison in this chapter. Instead of making a traditional account of comparative study, it is necessary to place the philosophies of Bhartrhari and Saussure against the central question of philosophy; the question of 'Being'. And then the response of these thinkers will be discussed in the light of the postmodern approach.
In our time, we have witnessed a radical growth of writings in comparative philosophy. Studies in this area tend to concentrate more and more on specific concepts and ideas. The concepts of 'self' 'causality' and the issues connected with epistemology, philosophy of mind and ethics have also been the main target of comparative philosophy. Philosophy has to explain man and his universe so the scope of the comparative philosophy is universal history and cosmos. That means the study of the nature of man expressed in history is the aim of comparative philosophy.

In different cultures and races man has expressed himself in several ways. And a true comprehensive philosophy will be one which is based on a comparative estimate of the many ways of his expression. Most of the civilizations in this world has its own philosophy. Every philosopher in each tradition knows others in the same tradition. It is true that no culture has had only a single system of philosophy.

On this globe human life is same every where. The different traditions in philosophy aim at and uphold the same values or similar values irrespective of their spacio-temporal limitations. Dr. Radhakrishnan says,

"...The fundamentals of human experience, which are the data of philosophical reflection, are the same every where. The transitoriness of all things, the play chance, the emotion of
love and hate, fear and jealousy. The continued presence of
death, the anxiety to overcome the corruptibility of things, to
enjoy the fleeting moment - These have determined for each
man his life's meaning and value ...”¹

In different cultures the approaches towards the fundamental issues
are different. But the basic issue is same everywhere. The difference between
the problems that life presented to man of different cultures and the various
ways in which men sought to solve the problems were not because the men of
East were a species of animal distinct from the man of West. But it may be
due to natural, social, and political differences. Due to the different types of
influences the solutions to the same problems in Each and West seem
different.

Basically man is same everywhere, but it does not mean that the
difference between East and West will be completely annihilated. As
Rudyard Kipling says East is East and West is West in their approaches
towards life. They do not meet, though in comparative philosophy we focus
our attention not on the differences only, but the similarities of the
approaches will be taken as important.

With the comparative studies we will be benefited by observing how
the different traditions face and try to overcome a problematic situation. We
can find out the significance of both similarities and difference in results, as well as in methods of the traditions.

The primary aim of the comparative study is the synthesis between the different cultures in the world, which is not meant for the dominance of one culture over another. Narrowness in the outlook of different cultures will be eliminated by the comparative study. Expansion and broadening of our views and visions are the results of comparative methods.

Today, in India philosophy, it is necessary for the Indian thinkers to reflect and reformulate our philosophies. Our concepts and categories of thinking are to be reread in the light of the global change in the philosophical discourse. When we compare our traditional system with it enables us to know which aspects of life and which values are considered to be important by each system and how each formulated and solved the problems relevant to those values. In the same tradition the same problem may not have been solved in the same way by all schools of thought. So a detailed comparison of the concepts and categories of the different schools is needed to show the different attitudes towards the same issue. Comparative study often recognises the complementary nature of each tradition with another one, and there is much that is common to all. A comparative philosopher always believes that each can learn much from the others and widen their scopes.
Such an approach will help us to mould our future in our life and also in our philosophy.

One meaning of comparative philosophy refers to the comparison which is made about the views of philosophers or philosophical movements which originated in two different civilizations. Comparing two philosophers from different civilizations has already become a main part of philosophy. Such comparative pairs are Jesus and Gandhi, Bradley and Sankara, Greek atomists and the Hindu Carvakas etc. In this type of comparisons the author simply prefers the similarities and differences between the thinkers.

The above mentioned type of comparison are usually taken as the model for comparison. Another geographical model of comparison is also used in philosophy. That is the model of Eastern and Western approach. But the philosophers who prefers the Eastern and Western approach in comparative philosophy often ignore the conceptual background of thought. And they simply jump towards the sameness of conclusion in these two systems.

In this thesis the term comparative philosophy is used to compare the different solutions to the same problem by different philosophers at different times. In a broad sense the term Eastern and Western is used to show not the
geographical boundaries exist in thought but to clarify different approaches by different systems on the same point.

TWO

In philosophy generally Eastern is taken as an intuitive approach and western proclaims the reason. Western civilization has a double heritage of ideals. The Greek, philosophers idealized reason but hebraic has idealized the will. St. Augustine synthesized these ideals in Christian theology. According to him will and reason are identical in God who is a perfect being. The history of Western philosophy often shows the controversies over the relative ultimacy of reason and will. If the Western, or Greek philosophy built their science and philosophers on geometry and mathematics, the Indians built their philosophy on language or Sabda Sastra. Matilal says.

"...It has often been claimed in recent times that in Indian scientific and philosophical tradition, mathematic plays a less crucial role and its place is taken by Grammar or linguistics..."2

But as a contrast to Western tradition the Indian thought tended to idealize intuition as ultimate Pramana in the philosophical discourse. Quoting
Radhakrishnan’s Gilbert lecture, J.N. Mohanty explains the nature of intuition in Indian thought. He says,

"...I will briefly comment on this last point, as well as on the much abused contrast between intellect and intuition, and finally revert to the question, has Indian thought developed a standard of critical rationality?

Let me begin with the concept of intuition. As illustrations of contemporary Hindu self-understanding, let me quote a couple of passage from Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. In his Hibbert Lectures he writes:

The Western mind lays great stress on science, logic and humanism. For the Hindus a system of philosophy is an insight, a darsana. It is the vision of truth and not a matter of logical argument and proof.

A little later, in the same context, he continues:

The acceptance of the authority of the Vedas by the different systems of Hindu thought is an admission that intuitive insight is a greater light in the abstruse problems of philosophy than logical understanding.
It is indeed interesting that in pressing this point about intuition Radhakrishnan discusses a whole list of intuitionists from the West: Bradley, Bergson, Croce, not to speak of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, and Pascal. The only Indian philosopher he discuss, in this context, is Sankara.

Radhakrishnan, however, saw more correctly that distinction is not be pressed beyond point: the distinction was one of degree. There are Indian *tarkikas*, Just as there are Western intuitionists. Thus Radhakrishnan writes much later:

Logical method knows no frontiers. The law of contradiction obtains in both East and West. Even in the East no one can hold at the same time the two principles of the reality of God and His unreality. The acceptance of one requires the rejection of the other...

The Western tradition, especially the Greek one idealized the ‘rational’ aspect of man. From the time of Plato and Aristotle, every philosopher tried to emphasize reason as forms, order, regularity and law. According to the Greek faith man can know nature because man is a rational animal. Thus in Greek tradition the reason, broadly conceived to include both rational structures (forms, patterns) and process (inference, deduction, proof) has
become the ultimate. Both nature and man are inherently rational. In this sense reason constitutes the ultimate reality. The Apollonian tradition, which began from Socrates was the foundation of rational method. Although the Greek thought proclaimed the reason, thinkers before the time of Socrates, emphasized the nature of Dionysian element in thought. The Greek thinkers, often grappled with issues involved in reason and will, which are the conflicting tendencies in human nature. When the preSocratic philosophers idealised the Dionysian nature, postSocratic thought emphasized the Appolonian element. The supremacy of the rational method governed the Western philosophical tradition till the time of Nietzsche. Nietzsche revalued the rational methods of Western thought and gave a twist to Western thought towards the Dionysian approach. So we can not say that the entire Western tradition is governed by the rational method. After the time of Nietzsche Western philosophy departed from the rational method of inquiry and turned towards the language. The supremacy of mathematics and rational approach has been replaced by the language studies in the West now. (We have discussed this issue in the first chapter.)

Now in the domain of philosophy a confusion arises. The supremacy of reason failed in the Western culture and its place is taken by the language studies. Structuralist and poststructuralist theories have given more
importance to the language and its relation to consciousness and understanding. In the post-Nietzschean time almost all of the metaphysical foundations of religion and the foundations of metaphysics have demolished. As we have seen in the first chapter the 'Modernist Enlightenment' programme has been challenged, its emancipatory practice failed. In the hands of Derrida who is a successor in the Nietzschean tradition not only Metaphysics but the term and concepts of philosophy themselves were deconstructed. Deconstruction was a shocking incident in philosophy. Which nullified our hopes in the emancipatory project and gave us a bleak vision.

The present scenario of our philosophical discourse confronts a crucial situation. Both the traditions of East and West face the same challenge. Religion, which once held the 'being' in its realm has lost its power and the metaphysical foundation of the theology is destroyed by Nietzsche. The picture of theology, as a grand narrative of our hope has vanquished. And at the same time people lost faith in politics too. Because all most all of the programme of the political parties were in accordance with the Kantian and rational enlightenment programme. The destructive effects of religion on one hand and the blind theorization of the politics on the other hand tended man to give up the two projects.
Neitzsche and later Heideggar deconstructed the metaphysics of Western civilization. But what is the position of 'Being' now? Is it a bleak one or a hopeless one, one which without any centre and destiny? Does the post modernism give us a nihilistic picture of the future? These questions occupy the central part of today's thinking. So that the 'destiny of the Being' in the post modern situation has to be discussed. We will discuss the question of being at the end of this chapter. Before that it is necessary to compare the similarities and differences between the philosophies of Bhartrhari and Saussure in a traditional manner, and the emerging from the comparison will be used to discuss the question of being in the postmodern situation.

In the postmodern situation the culture of both East and West have come to realize that their traditional life and thought patterns are not adequate to face the postmodern atmosphere, and each has to learn from the other. So many thinkers in East and West try to build bridges between East and West. In the postmodern situation, the thinkers realize that it is no longer sufficient to go back over the European and Christian cultural tradition because the horizon of the world is no longer confined to Europe and America. In order to make a new perspective scholars try to find out a new methodology in the postmodern condition. J.J. Clarke writes:
"...Though the idea of making comparison between Eastern and Western thought has been a powerful driving force behind orientalist studies since the seventeenth century, it was not until the 1920s that the discipline of comparative philosophy came to be explicitly formulated by the French philosopher Paul Masson-Oursel (1882-1956). In his book *Comparative Philosophy*, which became an influential text in France between the wars, he followed closely the aim of Comte’s positivism, claiming that the comparative method would become the indispensable prerequisite for the development of a truly scientific philosophy. This meant in the first place treating the philosophical traditions of the world’s civilizations as on a par with each other; for, as he put it, ‘No one philosophy has the right to put itself forward as co-extensive with the human mind’, and hence ‘philosophy cannot achieve positivity so long as its investigations are restricted to the thought of our own civilisation’ (Masson-Oursel 1926: 35 and 33). It also meant recognising that the philosophies of different civilisations expressed different mentalities which could not be understood purely in terms of
European categories, a view which he derived from his teacher Lucien Levy-Bruhl, and which led him to believe that comparisons are more worthwhile the greater the differences amongst the traditions in question. By drawing analogies, and by comparing and contrasting the philosophical insights and techniques characteristic of the great traditions of Europe, China, and India, he hoped to show that comparative philosophy must ultimately lead to an understanding of ‘the unity of the human mind under a multiplicity of aspects’, an enterprise which, Masson-Oursel claimed, is ‘capable of unlimited progress’ (ibid. :200 and 203)..."4

THREE

Chapter two and three are mainly devoted for the expository study of the philosophies of Bhartrhari and Saussure. In this section let us compare the philosophies of the two thinkers in a traditional manner.

To begin the comparison, we have to place some concepts against the philosophies of these two thinkers. In philosophy, issues are often discussed under the titles of Ontology, Epistemology and Theory of liberation. For the
convenience of comparison the philosophical outlooks of Bhartrhari and Saussure are brought under these titles.

In ontology the relation between the man and cosmos is explained. The nature of the cosmos and the nature of the man are also explained in Ontology.

In the *Vakyapadiya*, Bhartrhari does not give us a clear cut picture of Ontology. But from his writings we can trace his attitudes. According to Bhartrhari *Sabda Brahman* is the ultimate ground of all existence, he says that the *Sabda tattva* is the first principle of the universe. The *Sabda tattva* is an eternal and unchanging reality. *Sabda tattva* is the cause of all things in this universe. *Kala Shakti* plays an important role in the creation of this universe. Precisely this is the ontological standpoint of Bhartrhari. But from this it is not clear what he means by the concept *Sabda tattva*. He does not explain it in a satisfactory way. So we are not sure what he means when he says *Sabda tattva* is eternal. Does he mean that it is an entity such as Brahman in the *Advita Vedanta*? or some sort of 'Being' as in the case of the *Saivasiddhanta*. Unfortunately we are not sure about what he says. But he is not a follower of *Advaitavedanta*. Because use in the theory of phenomenalization of the absolute Bhartrhari did not give us a definite answer on the question whether he received the *Vedantic* stand point or not. However it must be stated that as
yet there seems to be no definite answer to this question. When we compare the Vedanta concept of 'mithya' and Bhartrharis concept of false and real, we should note that the concepts of Sabda need more examination and critical study.

In Saussure we cannot see such an ontological explanation. Bhartrhari was a real philosopher in every sense. He discussed the problem of ontology and epistemology with a philosophical outlook. But Saussure had no interest in this problem and he explained the nature of language and its relation to our consciousness only.

Bhartrhari explain the phenomenalization of the absolute at three levels. Pasynti, Madhyama and Vaikhari are the three levels of phenomenalization. He introduced the phenomenalization in the microcosm and macrocosm. The process in the macrocosm is same as of the microcosm. Definitely, here his position is a metaphysical one. We cannot find out any parallels between Bhartrhari and Saussure here too. As in the case of the Sabdabrahman, in this phenomenalization of the absolute too Bhartrharis' position is ambiguous.

Bhartrhari says that Sabda and Artha co-exist at the level of Pasynti. There is no difference between Sabda and artha at this stage. The Pasyanti state is taken by Bhartrhari as a pre-verbal or potential stage. To illustrate
this pre-verbal state he uses the simile of the yolk of the peacens egg. We can assume that, this stage is not only pre-verbal but, 'beyond verbal too, which represents the picture of a state which is 'beyond our ordinary language'. Bhartrhari here tries to explain the nature of the microcosm and macrosom and its relation.

On the above point of phenomenalization of the absolute and its relation with the microcosm we can never draw a parallel with Saussure.

In the domain of ontology we cannot see any similarities between Bhartrhari and Saussure. There are several reasons for it. The first one is Bhartrhari was a monist philosopher and he explained every thing in terms of his metaphysical viewpoint. But Saussure was not a 'philosopher' in the strict sense of that word. He simply narrated the function and working of the language only. Bhartrhari's concern was making a 'Grand picture' of the cosmos with the help of his views about language. So Bhartrhari differed very much from Saussure because Saussure never tried to bring a 'Grand Narrative' in philosophy.

In the area of Epistemology we can notice some similarities between Bhartrhari and Saussure. At first we can begin with nature of the word.

We must now examine how successfully Bhartrhari handles the problem of plurality and unity. The gap between plurality and unity was the
greatest challenge to Bhartrhari, because he was a monistic philosopher. For Bhartrhari the task was a difficult one because he has the double task of bridging the gap between the 'word' which is the metaphysical reality of Bhartrhari and the existence between the one and many. Bhartrhari explains the empirical level of the existence with the help of certain concepts. He explains the nature of the relation between word and consciousness.

According to Bhartrhari we are aware of the innumerable events and objects around us. We are aware of them not because of sense perception, but because we can cognise them as distinct and particular things subsumable under different names and forms. In the opinion of Bhartrhari there can be no cognitive awareness without its being intertwined with words. Bhartrhari's famous dictum is that word and consciousness are inseparably related.

Bhartrhari states that there cannot be consciousness without words. For him consciousness and words are not two distinct phenomena. In *Vakyapadiya* 1.118 he says that, "what is called awareness (consciousness) ie, *Samjna* is having the form of speech or words (*Vargupta*). Consciousness in all being never goes beyond it, that is, it is never different from the fact of having the form of the word".

Bhartrhari's explanation of the relation between language and consciousness is interesting. Because here he tries to offer us an explanation,
which is highly logical, and theoretically plausible. Saussure's explanation of
the relation between language and consciousness seems very much closer to
Bhartrhari's stand. For Saussure consciousness of an individual is the result
of the network of signs. To him there is no consciousness apart from
language. Consciousness is determined by the structure of the language and
its working.

Bhartrhari analyses the problem of concept and universal. In
philosophy it is usually believed that all words do not represent concepts.
Only class names like 'cow' 'beautiful' 'red' etc. are conceptualisable and
hence they stand for the universals. Concepts are formed on the basis of
some common attributes shared by the members of the class. But in
Vakyapadiya, the notion of the concept is quite different. According to
Bhartrhari all words are universal, so all words stand for concepts. Matilal
explains Bhartrhari's notion clearly. 5

According to Matilal for Bhartrhari words and concepts are merely two
sides of same coin. For Bhartrhari all forms of awareness imply the presence
of words. And all words are concepts. It is interesting to note that in the
Vakyapadiya even the terms like 'this' or 'that' which are ordinarily believed to
signify pure particulars, are taken as universals. In our ordinary language of
philosophy we do not take 'this' and 'that' as universals; the reason for such
a non-conventional view is due to his analysis of meaning in terms of 'sense' rather than 'reference'. As we have seen Bhartrhari takes the sentence as the primary unit of meaning not the word.

It is clear from the Vakyapadiya that, for Bhartrhari words can only refer to the universals of objects. Matilal explains Bhartrhari's position very clearly. He says:

"...If nominalism means simply that universals or abstract ideas are dispensable imaginative constructs or vikalpas, generated by linguistic practices only, then generally it leads to a vision of the world populated only by particulars or the Buddhist svalaksanas. However, there is an alternative. For one might also be holistic monist, and reject atomism by saying that particulars are also abstractions or are 'falsely' broken or 'extracted' pieces of the indivisible whole. Bhartrhari was such a holist. He said that words, concepts, and universals are all constructs. Words are abstracted out of whole sentences or sentence-complexes, and similarly concepts are abstracted out of the concrete experience of the whole. This abstraction is done through our inherent faculty of speech-impregnated awareness. The reality is an impartite
whole, which we never cognize as such, but always under the
guise of some words or word-generated concepts. For
Bhartrhari, having a concept and using a word are merely the
two sides of a coin..."6

To explain the relation between universal objects and universal of
words Bhartrhari use his monistic standpoint. Bhartrhari connected the two
universals in a special manner. In his analysis of 'language in use' he makes a
distinction between the expressed (Vacya) and the expressive word (Vacaka).
The Vacaka expresses the meaning and the meaning implies the object meant.
But objects meant are never directly grasped by the words because the
particulars of the world are never knowable. According to him the world
always mean the universal of the objects. Universals do not exist in the
objects. In the view of Bhartrhari the universals of words and universals of
things are word generated and hence there is no opposition between them.
The 'word universals' are transformed in to 'thing universals'.

Bhartrhari's concepts about the universals, and its relation with
consciousness, universal of objects and universal of words need a comparison
with Saussure.

In the 'course in linguistic', Saussure gives us a concrete picture about
the nature of language and nature of the concepts and universals. Saussure
does not believe in the 'essence hidden' nature of the words and concepts. No meaning is hidden in the words. There is no one to one relation between words and meaning. Words acquire meaning through the differentiation with other words in a system. Structure of a system produce meaning.

Definitely there is no comparison between Bhartrhari's concept of relation between words and consciousness and Saussure's concept of 'language and its structure'; but one point is interesting; these philosophers talk about the relation of the language with consciousness. In Bhartrhari consciousness is nothing but language. Saussure does not take such an extreme view. But from his writings it is clear that he considered the structure of the language as an important fact in the moulding of consciousness. After Saussure post-structuarilist thinkers have taken the structure of the language and signs as the ideology of a person who lives in a community.

Bhartrhari's concepts of 'concepts' and its relation with the world is poles apart from Saussure. According to Saussure concepts also are made by the differentiation process in the network of language.

'Universals' and its relation with the real world bring some knotty problems in the philosophy of Bhartrhari; he synthesized this problem with the help of his monistic outlook. But in the philosophy of Saussure the 'word universal and object Universal' have no place. He totally rejects such an
idealistic stand point and gives importance to particular in his language philosophy.

Vakyapadiya's differentiation of *sabda* form *dhvani* needs some careful comparison with Saussure. In the writings of Bhartrharis *Sabda* occupies a central role, he equates it with sphota to show the metaphysical nature of the language. In *pasyanti* state, *sabda* is in an unmanifested state with *pratibha*. According to Bhartrhari, *sabda* and *dhvani* are different sides of the same coin—'sound' which is produced by the speaker of the language is taken as *Dhvani*, and *sabda* taken as the 'real word' or the universal word; then Bhartrhari draws a line of demarcation between two classes of sound, one *prakrta* sound (original sound) and other *Vaikrta* sound (derivative transformation). In the opinion of Bhartrhari without the former the unmanifested sphota cannot be comprehended. In *Vakyapadiya* Bhartrhari gives a detailed account of the relation between *Sabda* and *dhvani*.

Bhartrhari's concept of *Sabda* and *dhvani* has definitely a metaphysical outlook which helped him to construct a 'Grand Narrative' of language. But in Saussure never we can see such an approach. But in this context the similarity and difference between Saussure's theory of langue, parole distinction with Bhartrhari is noted. Langue is the social product of speech and is relatively constant. Parole is to be taken as the individual speech
activities which are ephemeral and contingent. If we forget the metaphysical foundations of Bhartrhari’s analysis of *Sabda* and *dhvani* we can see some lines of similarities between the concept of *dhvani* with langue and parole. Kunjunni Raja remarks:

“...The smallest acoustic units of a parole are the sounds, whereas the engrams in language (residual trace left in the minds of the members of the speech community) are the phonemes- the phoneme in the language remains the same when uttered by different people at different speeds and intonation. The phonemes or the phonematic pattern with the normal time sequel is analogous to the sphota of *patanjali* and sounds of *la parole* is to his *dhvanis*...”

Language in the Sphota approach also needs a careful comparison with the Saussure’s concept of language.

Rejecting the view points of *Nyaya* Bhartrhari says that the words and their relation with the meaning are eternal; undervived and impersonal. For Bhartrhari the relation between the word and the meaning is not a matter of convention as *Nyaya* believes; to him the relation is eternal and universal. Because as we have seen in the concept of universal, the universals are the particulars of the *Sabda* or *Sabda Brahman*. In his holistic approach he does not
take the words as meaningful part. Confronted with the question of what constitutes the meaningful unit of language, Bhartrhari says that, it is the sentence which alone can be taken as the meaning full thing in language. Because meaning is a ‘sphota’ in the minds of the people. So he rejects the Abhihitanvaya vada and Anvitabhidana vada. Bhartrhari’s Sphota theory was an answer to the views of Nyaya philosophers. The single unitary nature of the sentence as ‘sphota’ reveals the meaning in an integrated manner.

Bhartrhari’s concept of language sometimes seems in coincidence with Saussure’s theory of Sign. Both of these philosophers talk about the nature of ‘sign’. For Saussure the nature of the ‘sign’ is not a ‘static’ one with some hidden ‘essence’. Every ‘sign’ gets its meaning through its differentiation with other signs in a system, in this aspect his concept of sign has no similarities with Bhartrhari’s concept of the Sabda. But Bhartrhari does not take the ‘word’ as a real one, always pointing to an ‘object’ meant. He says that the language itself is only an abstraction of the real. So according to Bhartrhari words have no ‘real value’ as we think.

It is not easy to draw a parallel between Bhartrhari’s concept of language and Saussure’s concept of image. But the concept of language in the writings of the two thinkers is noticeable. Both of them do not believe that the language gives us a clear cut picture of reality. According to them what
language presents is only an abstraction of the 'Real'. For Bhartrhari and Saussure the 'Reality' which appears in language 'as real' is not real as we believe. Both thinkers pointed out the 'fictional nature' of the language. Language in the structuralist approach does not give us a concrete picture of the world as the old tradition of language philosophies does. Structuralism was a break with the tradition of Moore and Russel. In the same manner Bhartrhari differs very much from the Nyaya school of thought.

The concept of sign, which is taken by Bhartrhari and Saussure as the pivot of their study separates them from the old tradition of language philosophy. Now we can make an enquiry about the nature of the Sphota and 'sign'. As we have seen in the second chapter Bhartrhari's concept of sphota is not simple as Saussure, Bhartrhari's concept of sign has many ramifications. He did not study the sign in isolation as Saussure did.

We can represent the concept of Bhartrhari's sign as shown below.

```
Sphota or sign
  | Connected toward universals
  | Connected to object universals.

Object universals
  | Originated from 'Sabda'

Word universals
```

175
Bhartrhari's concept of *sphota* involves a complicated network of different concepts of his thinking. We have discussed the different aspects of the concepts *sphota* in the second chapter. Saussure's concept of sign is not as complicated as Bhartrhari's. He says about the nature of signification, to him the 'sign' gets its meaning through differentiation. But Saussure misses some important points in his explanation of sign.

Saussure gives us an unsatisfactory explanation of the nature of sign. He is explaining about the nature of differentiation of sign in a system of sign, but a crucial question emerges here. What is the relation between a word and the objects, which stand as a reference of the word, in the external world. Take the example of 'Tree'. According to Saussure the word 'Tree' acquires its meaning by the differentiation of the word with other words in a system; for example, 'Tree' may differentiate itself from other words like 'thought', 'thick', 'thin' etc. In a system, at first this explanation of Saussure seems as a plausible one. However it does not solve the ontological problem of the
existence of the 'real tree' in the external world. Saussure's concept of sign 'Tree' does not refer the external tree which stands outside of the speaker. Then isn't any relation between the term tree and the object which stands outside of the language? Saussure does not consider this issue. So in the writings of Saussure we can see a deep gulf between language and reality. Marxist language philosopher Volosinov clearly pointed out this dangerous gulf in his 'Marxism and Philosophy of Language'. David Hawkes says,

"...The danger for structural analysis of signs is that, by focusing on the formal relations between the various elements of linguistic or semiotic codes, they will exclude or render nugatory the influence exercised on these signifying systems by external reality. Post-structuralist theory often takes the autonomous, constitutive role of representation for granted, or even celebrates it as a ludic liberation from dour referentiality. A salutary warning against this tendency was sounded in one of the earliest responses to Saussure, V.N. Volosinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929). Volosinov attacks Saussure's assumption that the structure of language is inherently imprinted on the human mind, and he points out the heritage of this idea in Cartesian rationalism:
The idea of the conventionality, the arbitrariness, of language is a
typical one for rationalism as a whole... What interests the
mathematically minded rationalists is not the relationship of the
sign to the actual reality it reflects or to the individual who is its
originator, but the relationship of sign to sign within a closed
system already accepted and authorized. In other words, they are
interested only in the inner logic of the system of signs itself, taken
as in algebra, completely independently of the meanings that give
signs their content.

Saussure and his followers, that is to say, cannot account for
either the individual subjective origin or the objective referent
of signs. Like Descartes, Saussure suggests that the material
world is constructed by certain universal properties of the
human mind. In Volosinov's view, this ignores the
interdependence of ideas, signs and things..."\(^8\)

But in the *Vakyapadiya* Bhartrhari explains the nature of word with the
help of his 'monistic philosophy'.

Once more we have to revalue Saussure concept of sign, which is
already explained in the third chapter.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Concept} & = \text{Signified} \\
\text{Sound image} & = \text{Signifier}
\end{align*}
\]
In this example Saussure take the example of a Tree. But what does he mean by the term ‘concept’ ‘tree’? The real tree or a concept of the tree? These questions are not answered in the writings of Saussure. In Saussure we can see a mixing up of ‘concept of the Tree’ and an object tree, which stands as a signified of the word Tree. Saussure does not separate it. Examining the Ogden- Richard’s basic triangle of meaning Kunjunni Raja observes:

"...Sir A. Gardiner while emphasizing the distinction between meaning and the thing meant, criticise Saussure for his omission of a clear reference to things...." [9]

Bhartrhari's concept of ‘sphota’ and Saussure's concept of ‘sign’ are poles apart. But a basic similarity exists between these two thinkers lay in their analysis of the working of the language. Both of them do not take the language as the ‘clear picture giving’ mirror. According to them language only gives us the Vikalpas of the reality. The words try to signify the things, but it fails. For Bhartrhari it may be due to the phenomenal nature of the world, in case of Saussure it is due to the nature of language itself. In this view Bhartrhari's vision comes close to the structuralist view of language.

The concept Pratibha, which is a special feature of the philosophy of Bhartrhari separates him from the structuralist point of the comprehension of meaning. A man is capable of using the language because, according to
sphota theory the Prathiba lies in his consciousness. It is a distinctive feature of Bhartrhari's thought. As we discussed in the second chapter it is flash of understanding; in the language philosophy of Saussure we cannot see such a concept. He does not turn his attention to such a 'metaphysical' explanation.

In the philosophy of Bhartrhari as we have already noted, we can see the levels of language and they are rooted in the doctrine of absolutism. Bhartrhari takes words as the unreal abstraction of the sentence, and the sentence the unreal abstraction of the paragraphs, thus he moves towards a hierarchy of monism. Thus at the top of the language hierarchy there is only one indivisible reality present, the ignorance of the human being prevent them from the understanding of the world in its real nature. Then he offers the practice of pranavadhyan to rectify our thought. Definitely the standpoint of Bhartrhari is basically metaphysical and in Saussure we cannot see such a an argument.

In this section we have compared the main concepts of Bhartrharis language philosophy with Saussure in a traditional manner. The similarities and difference between the basic issues such as, language, understanding, and meaning are explained. In the next section we will place the philosophy Bhartrhari and Saussure against the broad post-structuralistic notion of
thinking aimed at to bring a new exegesis of the concept 'subject' in the postmodern situation with the help of Bhartrhari's insights on 'subject'.

FOUR

Bhartrhari/Saussure/Derrida on the deconstruction of the subject

Once more in this chapter of comparison, we have to turn our thought towards the problem of subject and identity in the postmodern situation; which is dealt briefly in the introduction. As pointed out in the first chapter we face the problem of subject as the central question of philosophy in this postmodern condition.

We have seen that the concept of the human subject undergoes a significant transformation as a consequence of the developments in philosophy and psychology by the time of Nietzsche. To make a clear picture we have to summarise the attacks of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida on modernity and its project of subject making.

Here we seek to analyze critically the antipathy exhibited in postmodern theory towards the modern project. Whereas modernism tried to elevate man to God's place, postmodern theory seeks to destroy the very place and position of God and the modernist concept of man. Heidegger uncovers the originality of postmodern thought. In his works on Nietzsche
he says that through transvaluation of all values Nietzsche destroys the 'above' 'high' and 'beyond'.

Postmodern theory has been intent on completing Nietzsche's project of vanquishing God's shadow. He tried to eliminate the 'shadow' of the God from philosophical thinking. The denial of God, which is inaugurated by Nietzsche is reflected in postmodern theories of the language and truth. That is why Lyotard has defined postmodernism as the rejection of the meta narratives of modernism. Modernism in this sense is defined as a science that legitimates itself with reference to a meta discourse.

Descartes grounds all knowledge in the certainty of mans subjective existence. In his works the existence of God is proved only after giving the proof for 'cogito'. Only after demonstrating that man's ego is res cogitans does Descartes in his fourth meditation attempt to prove the existence of God. But this specious proof of Gods existence serves only to ground the validity of the cogito's reason, the very thing that proves the existence of God. Descartes' attempt was to formulate an understanding of God, through the reason. In Descartes' philosophy God is merely the metaphysical ground for the operation of the independent, autonomous ego. Reason here is not dependent on God, but God depend on the reason.
In his writings Nietzsche locates the origin of metaphysics in the distinction between the two worlds, a 'true' and an 'apparent' world. Nietzsche believes that in theology man has falsely projected his values upon God and upon a true divine world. Nietzsche believes that through the death of God and the abolition of the true world one can destroy the metaphysical foundation of the ontology. He formulated a new mode of thinking in philosophy, instead of giving a rational content to man he likes to rise the man at the realm of 'super man' with the help of a dionysian element.

While Nietzsche seeks to abolish the distinction between a 'true' and 'apparent' world Heidegger seek to reinscribe a distinction; the ontological difference between Being and beings. As Nietzsche Heidegger also wants to destroy the theological character of metaphysics. Because theology forgets this difference in defining Being as a being, as the efficient cause of beings. Like Nietzsche Heidegger seeks to destroy this theological character of metaphysics, which defines God and his transcendence.

In the place of a theological transcendence, which defines the position of God above man Heidegger formulates the ontological difference, based upon the relationship between human Dasein and Being, in which transcendence defines not the place of God above man, but rather designates
man's ability, in his essence as *Dasein* to differentiate between Being and beings.

Derrida deconstructs the traditional metaphysics not through identifying metaphysics as the forgetting of the *ontico ontological difference*, but rather by defining metaphysics as the debasement of writing. Both Heidegger and Derrida are questioning the privileging of 'presence' by traditional metaphysics, but Heidegger looks first to the description of human being while Derrida begins with description of writing in order to deconstruct the metaphysics of presence. In his 'Being and time' Heidegger focused his attention upon the metaphysical character of ontology; but in 'Of Grammatology' Derrida concentrated upon the metaphysical character of Linguistics.

Derrida's critique of transcendence in metaphysics takes the form of deconstruction of philosophy's irrepressible desire for a 'transcendental signified', which is taken by the philosophers as the source and ground of truth. Derrida questions the belief in a transcendental source of meaning and realm which seeks to impose a final, true interpretation of the world or text. In the writings of Derrida we can see the elucidation of Nietzsche's remark that "...I am afraid we are not rid of God because we still have faith in Grammar..."
The force of Derrida's move from man to language and from being to writing comes from his deconstruction of the subject, of the self-presence of the conscious subject. The deconstruction emerges out of Derrida's encounter with Edmund Husserl. The rereading of Husserl is made possible for Derrida by shifting the focus from consciousness to semiotics, from the subject to signs. In his writings Derrida deconstructed Husserl, demonstrating his complicity with the metaphysics of presence taking sign as his clue.

Through a deconstruction of Husserl's distinction between expression and indication, between 'spiritual' ideality and the 'bodily' reality of communication, Derrida will show that there is no pure internal sphere of self-consciousness and self-presence in which one expresses meaning to oneself without signs. Derrida's goal is to show that consciousness does not produce language, but rather that consciousness is produced by the structure, sign, and play of language. There is no innersphere that is completely internal, completely "one's own".

In Husserl's theory expression does not mean that the subject expresses itself to another; rather expression describes the way in which consciousness gives itself meaning about an object. According to Husserl, this process of expression is completely internal and completely free of the need for signs. But Derrida argues that the very process that allows for the distinction
between the transcendental consciousness, and the empirical consciousness, ie, the process of idealization, needs signs in order to constitute ideal objects. Here Husserl's attempt was to overcome this problem through positing a medium of expression which does not need signs, i.e., the phenomenological voice.

According to Derrida, Husserl will radicalize the necessary privilege of the phone which is implied by the whole history of metaphysics. By privileging the voice in expression and excluding writing and indication from consciousness, Husserl confirms the classical metaphysics of presence. Husserl begins with a distinction between the sensory or bodily aspect of expression and its non-sensory or mental aspect. His goal in positing the phenomenological voice is to exclude the physical, sensory, and bodily aspect of language (Indication) from the spiritual, non-sensory aspect of language (expression). Thus, Husserl's theory of language, which makes possible the division between the transcendental and worldly, is based upon a metaphysical dualism between spiritual / ideal and the physical / sensible.

Expression is characterized by all the privileged features of the 'spirit or soul' while, indication is characterized by all the denigrated features of the body and death.
Derrida deconstructs Husserl's theory of internal time consciousness, he says.

"...The possibility of re-petition in its most general from, that is, the construction of a trace in the most Universal sense— is a possibility which not only must inhabit the pure actuality of the now but must constitute it through the movement of difference it introduces. Such a trace is—if we can employ this language without immediately contradicting it or crossing it out as we proceed—more "primordial" than what is phenomenologically primodial..." 11

According to Derrida the movement of difference is not some thing that happens to a transcendent subject, but it produces the subject. Thus Derrida deconstructs the metaphysical subject through demonstrating that it is written, in the sense of 'proto writing'.

While in his writings, Descart uses the ideality of the "I am" to prove the immortality of the soul, Derrida deconstructs this ideality to deny the possibility of an immortal 'I' or soul. Derrida shows that the ideality of the "I am" can only be produced in signs and that the desire to exclude the needs for signs from the interior monologue which says "I am" is the desire to exclude one's death. For Derrida, the sign is the place of interweaving of
presence and absence, life and death, expression and indication, which Husserl has tried to separate through his transcendental idealism.

Heidegger’s attempt to destroy the history of metaphysics by aiming to work out the question of the meaning of Being in general through a mediation of Dasein. At the end of 'Being and time', this aim is made explicit; “our way of exhibiting the construction of Daseins Being remains only one way which we may take; our aim is to work out the question of Being in General”. In a structurally similar move, Derrida deconstructs the metaphysics of presence through raising the questions of the structure of the sign in general through a meditation of writing.

Does the deconstruction of the rationalist logos mean that all truth is the product of difference? Does the deconstruction of the transcendental consciousness mean that all transcendence has been destroyed? To give an answer to these questions we have to reread Bhartrhari.

From the above paragraphs we can reach at a conclusion, that, in the realm of philosophy now we have to make a new approach to discuss the problem of Being. Nietzsche and his followers deconstructed the logo-centric tradition of Western metaphysics. In this situation can we follow any alternative which is neither logo-centric nor metaphysical in its nature? In Bhartrhari we can see a new orientation of thinking. Matilal in his word and
world shows Bhartrhari’s unique position in the philosophy of Indian tradition which shows his anti ‘logo centric’ position in Vakyapadiya.

"...From the point of view of Bhartrhari’s sphota or the notion that language is an integral part of our consciousness, we may say that both speech and writing can alike be the ‘illuminator’ of the sphota. One is not primary and the other does not particularly distort the sphota. In fact both can equally ‘distort’ the sphota in a non-pejorative sense. Both ‘transform’ (cf. vikara) the untransformable, unmodifiable sphota, which is part and parcel of everybody’s consciousness. In the light of Bhartrhari’s theory, therefore, both the translations and the original (whether vocal or written) are in some sense transformations.

In spite of Bhartrhari’s explicit use of sabda and speech, I would argue that he was not guilty of ‘logocentrism’ in Derrida’s sense. In fact, in Indian tradition, where oral transmission of the Vedas (wrongly called the Scriptures, for the Sanskrit term is Sruti = something to be heard) was the norm, where oral recitation of the Buddha’s dialogues (the Buddhist scriptures where each section always starts ‘Thus, I
have heard...') lasted for centuries after the death of the Buddha (and the same is true of Jainism), and where oral transmission of other texts called sastras continued for a long time and texts were first memorized by students before any explanation or understanding was attempted, it is no wonder that the word for language was the word for sound (sabda). All these facts of the Indian tradition might have been historically conditioned because scholars faced extreme difficulties due to climatic and other conditions, for example the monsoon, in preparing and preserving writing materials. But the tradition, I argue, is free from the fault of logocentrism. For logocentrism, as I see it, flourishes and derives nourishment from the explicit condemnation (and also 'damnation'- it has been called a sin) of writing, otherwise 'speech' cannot be promoted to the prime place. And for this point one can turn to Derrida. It is obvious to any reader of Derrida how this 'condemnation', in paradoxical manner, provides ammunition for Derrida's deconstruction of the texts of Saussure and Rousseau. As far as I know, such condemnation of writing was conspicuous by its absence in
the Indian tradition in which Bhartrhari flourished. Hence the sphota theory of language was not ‘logocentric’ in any damning sense. As I have said, both sonic and graphic symbols can be the ‘illuminator’ of the sphota; and being the illuminator either of them can be identified with the illuminated. Both speech and writing can be in perfect harmony (where talk of ‘violence’ would be pointless) in Bhartrhari’s holistic view of language...

Following these insights of Matilal we can analyse Bhartrhari’s concept of Kala and Derrida’s Concept of Differance. As Derrida Bhartrhari also rejects the logocentric vision of language. It is interesting and remarkable that Bhartrhari, standing in the monistic tradition of East, rejects successfully the logocentric concepts of some other schools, especially of Advaita Vedanta of Sankara.

In the view of Bhartrhari in language at all its levels, the dynamics of separation into words (Sabda) and meaning (artha) present begininglessly. In the same manner Derrida asserts that language has no origin. According to Derrida ‘There is nothing outside the text; that mean there is no metaphysical “other” outside of the text or speech that starts the language. Like Derrida Bhartrhari sees sequencing or difference as the characteristic dynamic of
language in all its levels. To him the innermost apparently unitative level of speech is pregnant with the power of difference. In Vakyapadiya, Sabdatattva is not taken as a lesser Brahman, but is identical with Brahman itself and the only Brahman there is. Brahman, for Bhartrhari, as the word principle, in an intrinsically dynamic and expressive reality. Both Bhartrhari and Derrida describe the immanent power of becoming in terms of time and space.

For Derrida as we have seen in the first chapter, writing in prior to spoken. Derridas' real point has nothing to do with historical priority of the written. His aim is by reversing the usual speech writing hierarchical opposition which has been accepted in the west since Socrates, to counter the simple choice of one of the term over the other. For Derrida writing includes even the neuronal traces in the brain. Derrida even playfully alludes to DNA as a 'writing' or trace present in all living substance. Here Derrida's initial aim is to deconstruct the traditional priority accorded to speech over writing. According to Derrida western thought has always been structured in terms of dichotomies or polarities: good vs evil, truth vs error, man vs women, being vs nothingness etc. these opposites, however have not been seen as equal entities. The second term is always put in position of being a fallen or the corrupted version of the first. Thus evil is the lack of good, absence is the lack of presence. Both in time and quality the first term get the priority. The
general result has been the privileging of units, identity and temporal and spatial presence over diversity, difference, and deferment in space and time. Thus in Western philosophy the question of the nature of being has been answered in terms of Presence.

As we have seen earlier the self presentation of meaning in the spoken word is known as logocentrism. Writing from the logocentric view, is seen as a secondary representation of speech to be used when speaking is impossible. Derrida's critique is not aimed at reversing this value system. Rather his critique attempts to dissect the whole system of metaphysical opposition upon which the speech versus writing debate is grounded. Derrida finds that both speech and writing are begininglessly structured by difference and distance.

Almost all of the schools in Indian philosophy, with the exceptions grammarian school, largely share the same logocentric biases towards being and speech. In the tradition of Indian thought we cannot see the exact parallels of 'logocentric' concepts, but so many philosophical systems in India privileges one opposite or extreme over the other in case of speech and writing.

Both Derrida and Bhartrhari agree that there is no source or ground of language outside or beyond language. Language does not depend upon
something known as god or logos. In the *Vakyapadiya* the absolute is known as *Sahdatattva* or the word principle. For Bhartrhari there is not something apart from or beyond language. Derrida as we have seen, deconstructed the old view point; that a separate being or presence is immediately reflected in speech and then given a secondary representation in writing. Derrida deconstructed this argument as it is presented in Plato, Rousseau, and others, by finding writing when understood as difference, to contain all of spoken language, and all inscribed language.

We can see some interesting points of similarities between Bhartrhari's *Sahdatattva* and Derrida's arche-writing or trace. For Derrida the arche-writing or trace contains within it the possibility for all oral and written language. Arche-writing is nothing but a dynamic expressive difference. Arche-writing does not depend upon sound or writing; but it is the condition for such sound and writing. According to Derrida the arche-writing does not exist its possibility is anterior to all expression (signified-signifier, content-expression etc.). In the *Vakyapadiya* Bhartrhari says that *Brahman*, the word principle is without beginning or end. The *Sahdatattva* is divided by the function of its own inherent powers. Through the sequencing power of time or *Kala* the word principle manifests itself in the expressive activity of language. As a contrast to the philosophy of sankara and his theory of *Maya*,

194
this activity is seen as a real manifestation of Sabdatattva. Hear Bhartrhari refutes the vivartavada of sankara. For Bhartrhari Brahman is the word principle, the intrinsically dynamic and expressive reality. And the language is its manifestation through the process of temporal becoming. As Derrida who say about trace Bhartrhari also uses the notion of a beginningless trace that is inherent in consciousness; known as Pratibha. We have discussed this concept in chapter two of this work. Bhartrhari discusses the trace of speech in relation to previous birth.

In the writings of Derrida and Bhartrhari we can see that, it is the pure possibility of difference that is manifested as language. For Derrida the arche-trace manifests into the opposing forms of inner concept and outer sound image. When Derrida uses the term 'sign' to refer the whole, Bhartrhari uses the term 'sphota' to refer the whole. In the signs of Derrida signified refers to the abstract concept, and signifier refers to the spoken image. Sphota represents both artha and dhwani, artha refer to the concept of meaning and dhwani refer to the uttered sound. For both Derrida and Bhartrhari the linguistic whole or the sign or sphota has an inherent force towards manifestation that produce the signifier and signified; or artha and dvani. Both sign and sphota are rooted with in language, that works through spacing, punctuation, differentiation in time and space.
Today in our area of postmodern discourse we can see that Bhartrhari's concept *Sahdatattoa* and Derrida's concept of arche-writing have no difference. Both of them would find common cause against those who try to locate the absolute outside of language.

In the tradition of Indian philosophy Bhartrhari's position is unique. He distinguishes himself from other schools such as *Vedanta*, *Sankhya*, and *Saivism* with the help of his own philosophical outlooks. As we have seen Bhartrhari successfully avoided the 'logo centric' and 'phono centric' charges against his thought. In his approach he comes very much close to the position of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Bhartrhari does not consider the 'being' as the metaphysical reflection of the 'Being' as Sankara. He takes the whole universe and language as a fiction or a *leela* or in Nietzsche words a 'child's play' - or a huge cosmic drama. He is always trying to move away from the 'truths' of language. Finally he arrives at the conclusion that, as Nietzsche, the metaphorical language, which give us only the false picture of the world is not sufficient to give us the 'true picture' of the world.

Bhartrhari has, finally, extended the notion of *apoddhara* - abstraction which is peculiar to grammar - also to language which implies that for him language is as fictitious as grammar. Here we can hear the echo of Nietzsche's words, that "I am afraid we are not rid of God because we still
have faith in grammar”. At the end of his philosophical enquiry Bhartrhari relinquished the very subject matter of his enquiry, that is the language itself, as Nietzsche relinquished 'the false mirror of reality'. For Bhartrhari and Nietzsche grammar is the sanctum sanctorum for the 'God' or 'presence' or the metaphysical truth; which gives meaning to our 'language' and 'life'. Rejecting the position of Grammar and Language in ontology and epistemology both of these thinkers rejected the metaphysical foundations of philosophy in their own tradition.

In our present day postmodern situation all most all of the traditional modes of thinking have been deconstructed, even the approaches of Saussure has also been deconstructed by Derrida. In this situation we have to make a thorough study of Bhartrhari and his philosophy, in order to escape from the ‘aimless and futureless’ situation of philosophy. Fortunately unlike Derrida, Bhartrhari’s philosophy offers us a picture of ‘being’, which is free from the charges of ‘logocentrism’ and the traditional metaphysical outlooks. As Matilal did we should take the responsibility of the construction of the new Bhartrharian approach in our philosophical tradition. Which alone will help us to mould our own thought and future in philosophy.
NOTES


