

**Part 1**  
**Indian Approaches to Language**

**Some major concepts of the Word in the Veda.**

Here I would like to make a brief overview of the Vedic concept of the Word with the help of some quotations from the Rig Veda and Atharvaveda. These conceptions will be necessary for us to trace their development in the post Vedic linguistic literature.

So, in the Veda:

1) the Word (uktha-, vacas, śastra-, stoma-, gir, vāk, vāṇi, brahman, mantra-, nāman) is a secret speech, (guhya-, guhā, gūḍha-, apīcya-, pratīcya-, niṇya-),<sup>1</sup> for it is seen as the Power of the Divine Consciousness emerging out of darkness of Inconscient, manifesting itself in the world.

2) The Word itself belongs to the Lord, it is His Consciousness, and, when uttered by man in form of a hymn as conscious offering, it is returning to its Master, Brahmanaspati, for it is the Word of the Lord which is uttered.<sup>2</sup>

3) Thus the Word creates the world. It is coming down from the Lord and it is rising up back to his Master. It is by this stirring within the creation of a triple being of mind, life and body, that the Word brings into motion the Divine Consciousness and creates all the beings in a new fashion more suitable for the Divine expression.

4) There is always a new word, a new name, which is to be found and uttered, expressing a new consciousness, changing the old being. This new word is opposed by those who carry the word of old.<sup>3</sup> The word which was once true is resisting now the coming of a new. The forces behind it are the forces of darkness, of the first creation, which want to preserve their existence by not accepting the change, coming with a new expression, a new word. They corrupt the consciousness of man, the 'ever-advancing pilgrim', and offer him the word of crookedness. The Aryan is looking for the word of straightness.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> apīcyam nāma, gūḍham nāma, etc;

<sup>2</sup> RV 5.12.1

<sup>3</sup> The Semitic and the Vedic approaches to the word differ in this particular aspect that there must be always a new word found for the expression of the growing within consciousness, whereas in the Biblical sense the Word of God is to be obeyed and followed, under the fear of punishment.

<sup>4</sup> RV 5.12.6

Let us trace back some of the mentioned features of the Word in the selected texts quoted below from the Rig Veda and Atharva Veda.

RV 10.71.1

bṛhaspate prathamam vācō ágram  
yát praírata nāmadhéyaṃ dádhānāḥ  
yád eṣāṃ śréṣṭham yád ariprám āsīt  
preṇā tād eṣāṃ níhitam gúhāvīḥ

*"O Lord of the Word, that first movement of the Word at the beginning of creation when they [gods] moved establishing the Name that must be established, what was the best and the pure that they discovered by the power of love hidden in the cave of the heart!"<sup>5</sup>*

The origin of the Word is hidden deep in the cave of Subconsient. Sometimes it is in added in the cave of the heart, ḥṛdi guhāyām. The Word is rising from that hidden place and it creates in us a new perception, a new consciousness, capable of perceiving the Divine. This is one origin within the heart, which Sri Aurobindo comments on as brahman.

But there is also another perception of the Word as established in the highest heaven, parame vyoman. So let us examine some of the major Vedic texts.

RV 1.164.39-47:

r̥cō aksāre paramé víoman yásmin devā́ ádhi víśve niṣedúḥ  
yás tán ná véda kím r̥cā́ kariṣyati yá ít tād vidús tá imé sám āsate  
1.164.39

*The hymns are in the highest heaven, where all the gods abide. The one who does not know that, what will he do with the hymn? But those who know they are perfectly united.<sup>6</sup>*

gaurīr mimāya salilāni tákṣatī ékapadī dvipádī sā́ cátuṣpadī  
aṣṭāpadī návapadī babhūvúṣī sahásrākṣarā paramé víoman 1.164.41

<sup>5</sup> 'Namadheya', giving name, lit. 'the name which must be established', dheya, f.p.p. of root dhā, to establish, to place, to put, "that Name which will/must be established".

There is an interesting note from Padoux: "the outset points to a major role of the Word (which will be greatly emphasized in Tantrism), that of the placing of names, *namadheya*; and giving a name, in mythic thought (not only in India), is giving being. For the word, the name, as early as the Rig Veda, is the very being of what is named, it is immortal (amṛta; cf. 10.139.6, where immortal [names] of the cows are the cows themselves)."

<sup>6</sup> Griffith's translation: "Upon what syllable of holy praise-song, as twere their highest heaven, the Gods repose them, – Who knows not this, what will he do with praise-song? But they who know it well sit here assembled."

*"She has created the streams of luminous waters, the Word, the Strongest among Lights (gauri).*

*She has fashioned all the creatures as one, two and four footed, who have become the eight and nine footed! The thousand aksharas [of the Word are] in the highest heaven!"<sup>7</sup>*

tásyāḥ samudrā́ ádhi ví kṣaranti téna jīvanti pradíśaś cátasraḥ  
tátaḥ kṣarati akṣáraṃ tád víśvam úpa jīvati 1.164.42

*"It is from her, the All-creating Word, that the waters of the upper Ocean flow down in all directions. It is by that [movement] all live in every corner of the world.*

*It is from that [movement of the Word] that Unchangeable is changing, (or Being is becoming). It is from that [movement] that all Universe lives."*

catvā́ri vā́k párimitā padā́ni tā́ni vidur brāhmaṇā́ yé maṇiṣiṇaḥ  
gúhā trīṇi níhitā néngayanti turíyaṃ vācó manuṣyā́ vadanti 1.164.45

*"The Word has been measured in four quarters. Those quarters are known to the knowers of the Word, brāhmaṇaḥ, who possess also the power of the Mind, maṇiṣiṇaḥ.<sup>8</sup>*

*In the hidden place the three are established, which do not move. And the forth one men speak."<sup>9</sup>*

krṣṇám niyā́naṃ hárayaḥ suparṇā́ apó vāsā́nā dívam út patanti  
tá āvavrtran sádanād ṛtásya ā́d íd ghr̥téna pṛthiví́ ví udyate 1.164.47

*"Dark the descent,[and] golden the birds; thus wearing the robes of the waters they are rising to heaven and again they return from that Seat of the Truth, and all the earth is moistened with their golden clarity."<sup>10</sup>*

<sup>7</sup> ibid: "Forming the water-floods, the buffalo hath lowed, one-footed or two-footed or four-footed, she, Who hath become eight-footed or hath got nine feet, the thousand-syllabled in the sublimest heaven."

<sup>8</sup> This will become a reference to the later concept of fourfold Word: vaikharī, madhyamā, paśyantī and parā vāk.

<sup>9</sup> Griffith's translation: "Speech hath been measured out in four divisions, the Brahmins who have understanding know them. Three kept in close concealment cause no motion; of speech, men speak only the fourth division".

<sup>10</sup> ibid. "Dark the descent: the birds are golden-coloured; up to the heaven they fly robed in the waters. Again descend they from the seat of Order, and all the earth is moistened with their fatness."

Who are these golden birds descending into the darkness and wearing the form of waters (apas)? Why do they fly up to the sky again and again return to the earth to moisten it with a clarified butter (ghṛta)?

It is on the way up they wear the waters of our offering, and on the way back they carry the clarified butter to nourish the growth of Agni, the luminous dweller within the substance. They descend into the darkness as shining birds from heaven and they ascent carrying our unilluminated substance of consciousness (apas) for transformation up to heaven.<sup>11</sup>

It is interesting to note in this regard another famous hymn where the symbol of the bird, pataṅga is mentioned again in the terms of speech and mind:

RV 10.177

paṭaṅgám aktám ásurasya māyáyā hr̥dā paśyanti mánasā vipaścítaḥ  
samudré antáḥ kaváyo ví cakṣate máricīnām padám ichanti vedhásaḥ  
10.177.01

*"This Bird the wise see (discover) in their heart by the Creative Force of Maya of the Asura, by the Thought.*

*Inside the Ocean the seers distinguish it clearly; those who are brave are seeking the Seat of Light!"*

paṭaṅgó vācam mánasā bibharti tāṃ gandharvó avadad gárbhe antáḥ  
tāṃ dyótamānām svariyaṃ manīṣām ṛtásya padé kaváyo ní pānti  
10.177.02

*"This Bird, the Sun, carries the Word by the Thought. It is the Word that Gandharva spoke first seated within the Embryo.*

*The shining heavenly Word, full of Thought, the seers always protect in the place of the Truth."*

ápaśyaṃ gopām ánipadyamānam ā ca párá ca pathíbhiś cárantam  
sá sadhrícīḥ sá víṣūcīr vásāna ā varīvarti bhúvaneṣu antáḥ 10.177.03

*"I saw him, the Protector of Knowledge, uncreated, moving on his paths here and beyond. He moves in oneness, and in maniness; a luminous dweller within rotates within the worlds."<sup>12</sup>*

<sup>11</sup> Cf. the concept of apas and ambhas, as the lower and upper oceans, respectively in the AitUp 1.1.2,3

<sup>12</sup> Commentary of Sayana on RV10.177 is quite interesting: "The Sun carries the Word of all living creatures by his own Thought, holds and supports them, when He takes a form of Antaryāmin, sends the Word forward – that is the meaning originated in heaven, and is full of Thought, which means that it is a Master of Thought, the Creatrix of Delight, as it were. Such a Word the seers, the knowers of Shastra always protect and cherish in the Place of Truth, in the place of the Supreme Spirit."

<sup>12</sup> Griffith's translation.

RV 8.100.10

yád vāg vādanti avicetanāni rāṣṭrī devānām niṣasāda mandrā  
cātasra ūrjaṃ duduhe páyāṃsi kúva svid asyāḥ paramám jagāma  
8.100.10

*"When Blissful Speech, speaking her unknown utterances, Queen of the gods, settled in the manifestation, and was milked by all the nourishing force of her four regions, where did she hide her highest part?"<sup>13</sup>*

devīm vācam ajanayanta devās tāṃ viśvárūpāḥ paśavo vadanti  
sā no mandrā iṣam ūrjaṃ dúhānā dhenúr vāg asmān úpa súṣṭutaítu  
8.100.11

*"The Goddess Speech was brought to birth by the gods. It is with her word that all the creatures speak here. It is she who is milked with the blissful draught full of power. This nourishing Cow, the Word, should come to us, perfectly affirmed by us!"*

sákhe viṣṇo vitarám ví kramasva diyaúr dehí lokám vájrāya viṣkábhe  
hánāva vr̥trám riṇácāva síndhūn índrasya yantu prasavé vísr̥ṣṭāḥ  
8.100.12<sup>14</sup>

*"O Friend Vishnu, step into the open with your wide strides; O Heaven, give space for the lightning to leap out!  
May we two strike the all-obstructing Vritra, may we two free the rivers!  
May the rivers flow free, in the pressing of Indra."*

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"And thus sent by the Sun the Word [goes] in the Embryo, inside the body, and the vital force, called Gandharva, spoke this luminous Word, shining and heavenly, for it is originated in heaven, and is full of Thought, which means that it is a Master of Thought, the Creatrix of Delight, as it were. Such a Word the seers, the knowers of Shastra always protect and cherish in the Place of Truth, in the place of the Supreme Spirit."

<sup>13</sup> Again the reference to the four parts of the Word: parā, paśyantī, madhyamā, vaikhari. The rishi asks where is hidden her transcendental part: parā vāk.

<sup>14</sup> Griffith's translation:

"When, uttering words which no one comprehends, Vak, Queen of Gods, the Gladdener, was seated, The heaven's four regions drew forth drink and vigour: now whither hath her noblest portion vanished?"<sup>10</sup>

"The Deities generated Vak the Goddess, and animals of every figure speak her. May she, the Gladdener, yielding food and vigour, the Milch-cow Vak, approach us meetly lauded." 11

"Step forth with wider stride, my comrade Visnu; make room, Dyaus, for the leaping of the lightning. Let us slay Vrtra, let us free the rivers let them flow loosed at the command of Indra."

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*Atharva Veda* in the very first hymn starts with invocation to the Lord of the Word, *Vācaspati*, in the most mysterious way invoking him to manifest all the forms by the power of the Word:

ye triṣaptāḥ pariyanti viśvā rūpāṇi bibhrataḥ/  
vācaspatir balā teṣāṃ tanvo adya dadhātu me/ 1

*"Those three times seven, which are all over, carrying all the forms [of manifestation]; may the Lord of the Word now establish their powers and beings within me!"*

punar ehi vācaspate devena manasā saha/  
Vasoṣpate ni ramaya mayyevāstu mayi śrutam/ 2

*"Come again, O Lord of the Word, together with the divine Mind! O Lord of the luminous dweller within the substance, enjoy being within me! May that which was heard by me (revealed to me) stay within me!"*

ihaiva abhi vi tanu ubhe ārtñī iva jyayā/  
vācaspatir ni yacchatu mayyevāstu mayi śrutam/ 3

*"Here indeed spread both the ends, as if of a bow when the string is released.  
O Lord of the Word, expand in me totally, may the revealed be always in me!"*

upahūto vācaspatir upāsmān vācaspatir hvayatām/  
saṃ śrutena gamemahi mā śrutena vi rādhiṣi/ 4

*"Called upon by us is the Lord of the Word! May the Lord of the Word call upon us! May we become one with that what was revealed in us, may I never part from it!"*

There are few fundamental conceptions here which have to be pointed out. First the Lord of the Word is to establish all the varieties of his manifestation in the consciousness of man, "the three times seven, which carry all the forms [in manifestation]". Second *vācaspati*, the Lord of the Word, is identified with the *vasoṣpati*, the Lord of the luminous dweller within the substance, which is a constant epithet of Agni, for he is the luminous dweller in the darkness of the subconscious material substance. He is also an auspicious guest of men, *atithiḥ śivo naḥ*, a luminous dweller within man and his guide.<sup>15</sup> So the Lord of the Word is to come with the divine Mind, *devena manasā*. It is through the relation of these two that the liberation of the soul can be achieved. "To turn thought and

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<sup>15</sup> See RV 5.1-12

word – writes Sri Aurobindo, - into form and expression of the superconscious Truth which is hidden beyond the division and duality of the mental and physical existence was the central idea of the Vedic discipline and the foundation of its mysteries.”<sup>16</sup>

Sri Aurobindo commenting on the legend of Angirasa Rishis explains this profound imagery of the three times seven in the Veda:

“They conceived in mind the first name of the fostering cows, they found the thrice seven supreme (seats) of the Mother; the females of the herd knew that and they followed after it; the ruddy one was manifested by the victorious attainment (or, the splendour) of the cow of Light, ”

te manvata prathamam nāma dhenos triḥ sapta mātuḥ paramāṇi vindan/  
taj jānatīr abhyanūṣata vrā āvirbhuvad aruṇīr yaśasā goḥ.

The Mother here is Aditi, the infinite consciousness, who is the Dhenu or fostering Cow with the seven rivers for her sevenfold streaming as well as Go the Cow of Light with the Dawns for her children; the Ruddy One is the divine Dawn and the herd or rays are her dawning illuminations. The first name of the Mother with her thrice seven supreme seats, that which the dawns or mental illuminations know and move towards, must be the name or deity of the supreme Deva, who is infinite being and infinite consciousness and infinite bliss, and the seats are the three divine worlds, called earlier in the hymn the three supreme births of Agni, Satya, Tapas and Jana of the Puranas, which correspond to these three infinities of the Deva and each fulfils in its own way the sevenfold principle of our existence: thus we get the series of thrice seven seats of Aditi manifested in all her glory by the opening out of the Dawn of Truth.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The Secret of the Veda, p. 433

<sup>17</sup> The Secret of the Veda, p. 205

### The Vedic Concept of the Word in the light of Sri Aurobindo.

Before we come to the post Vedic literature I would like to dwell on a few observations made by Sri Aurobindo, since we would need his help in understanding the psychological symbolism of the Veda.

“In the system of the Mystics”, - writes Sri Aurobindo, – “which has partially survived in the schools of Indian Yoga, the Word is a power, the Word creates. For all creation is expression, everything exists already in the secret abode of the Infinite, *guhā hitam*, and has only to be brought out here in apparent form by the active consciousness.

Certain schools of Vedic thought even suppose the worlds to have been created by the goddess Word and sound as first etheric vibration to have preceded formation. In the Veda itself there are passages which treat the poetic measures of the sacred mantras, *anuṣṭubh*, *triṣṭubh*, *jagatī*, *gāyatrī*, - as symbolic of the rhythms in which the universal movement of things is cast.

By expression then we create and men are even said to create the gods in themselves by the mantra. Again, that which we have created in our consciousness by the Word, we can fix there by the Word to become part of ourselves and effective not only in our inner life but upon the outer physical world.

By expression we form, by affirmation we establish. As a power of expression the word is termed *gīḥ* or *vacas*; as a power of affirmation, *stoma*. In either aspect it is named *manma* or *mantra*, expression of thought in mind, and *brahman*, expression of the heart or the soul,—for this seems to have been the earlier sense of the word *brahman*, afterwards applied to the Supreme Soul or universal Being.”<sup>18</sup>

“Brahman in the Veda signifies ordinarily the Vedic Word or mantra in its profoundest aspect as the expression of the intuition arising out of the depths of the soul or being. It is a voice of the rhythm which has created the worlds and creates perpetually. All world is expression or manifestation, creation by the Word.

Conscious Being luminously manifesting its contents in itself, of itself, *tmanā*, is the superconscient; holding its contents obscurely in itself it is the subconscious.

The higher, the self-luminous descends into the obscure, into the night, into darkness concealed in darkness, *tamas tamasā gūḍham*, where all is hidden in formless being owing to fragmentation of consciousness, *tucchyenābhv- apihitam*. It arises again out of the Night by the Word to reconstitute in the conscient its vast unity, *tan mahinājāyataikam*. This vast Being, this all-containing and all-formulating consciousness is

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<sup>18</sup> The Secret of the Veda, p. 270



Brahman. It is the Soul that emerges out of the subconscious in Man and rises towards the superconscious. And the word of creative Power welling upward out of the soul is also brahman.

The Divine, the Deva, manifests itself as conscious Power of the soul, creates the worlds by the Word out of the waters of the subconscious, *apraketam salilam sarvam*,— the unconscious ocean that was this all, as it is plainly termed in the great Hymn of Creation. This power of the Deva is Brahma, the stress in the name falling more upon the conscious soul-power than upon the Word which expresses it. The manifestation of the different world-planes in the conscious human being culminates in the manifestation of the superconscious, the Truth and the Bliss, and this is the office of the supreme Word or Veda. Of this supreme word Brihaspati is the master, the stress in this name falling upon the potency of the Word rather than upon the thought of the general soul-power which is behind it. Brihaspati gives the Word of knowledge, the rhythm of expression of the superconscious, to the gods and especially to Indra, the lord of Mind, when they work in man as "Aryan" powers for the great consummation."<sup>19</sup>

The Vedic concept of the Word as an expression and affirmation of consciousness, hidden but seeking its expression is profound and unique. It introduces powerfully in a deeply psychological manner the creative aspect of the Word, which was somehow lost in the later treatises on Linguistics, focusing more on the communicative and sometimes on its cognitive aspects.

Sri Aurobindo defines the hierarchy of four levels of Speech: physical, vital, mental and supramental, which in Indian grammatical tradition resemble and can be identified with *vaikharī*, *madhyamā*, *paśyantī* and *parā vāk*.

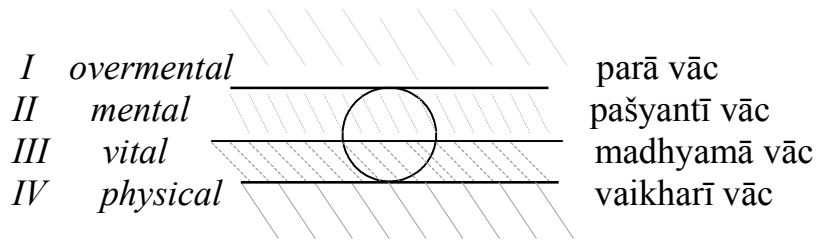
"Let us suppose a conscious use of the vibrations of sound which will produce corresponding forms or changes of form. ... Let us realise then that a vibration of sound on the material plane presupposes a corresponding vibration on the vital without which it could not have come into play; that, again, presupposes a corresponding originative vibration on the mental; the mental presupposes a corresponding originative vibration on the supramental at the very root of things. But a mental vibration implies thought and perception and a supramental vibration implies a supreme vision and discernment. All vibrations of sound on that higher plane is, then, instinct with and expressive of this supreme discernment of a truth in things and is at the same time creative, instinct with a supreme power which casts into forms the truth discerned and eventually, descending from plane to plane, reproduces it in the physical form or object created in Matter by etheric sound. Thus we see that the

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<sup>19</sup> The Secret of the Veda, p. 318

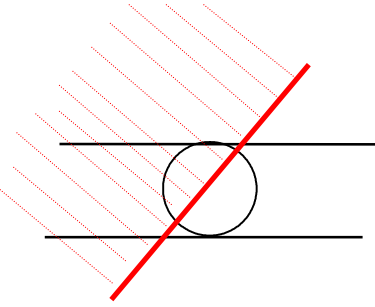
theory of creation by the Word which is the absolute expression of the Truth, and the theory of the material creation by sound-vibration in the ether correspond and are two logical poles of the same idea. They both belong to the same ancient Vedic system."<sup>20</sup>

Here I shall introduce a scheme, which will help us to imagine of how different levels of the Word relate to each other and to the objective reality (Sanskrit terms are from Bhartrihari and Abhinavagupta):

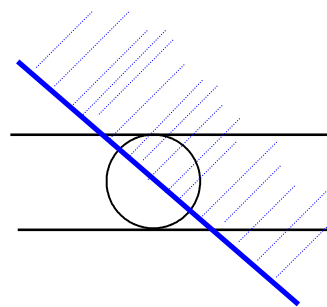


So the Creative power of the World, Cit-Shakti or Cit-Tapas, introduces the two aspects of Knowledge and Power, Name and Form, (nāma-rūpa), into manifestation, and by their interaction creates all the varieties of things:

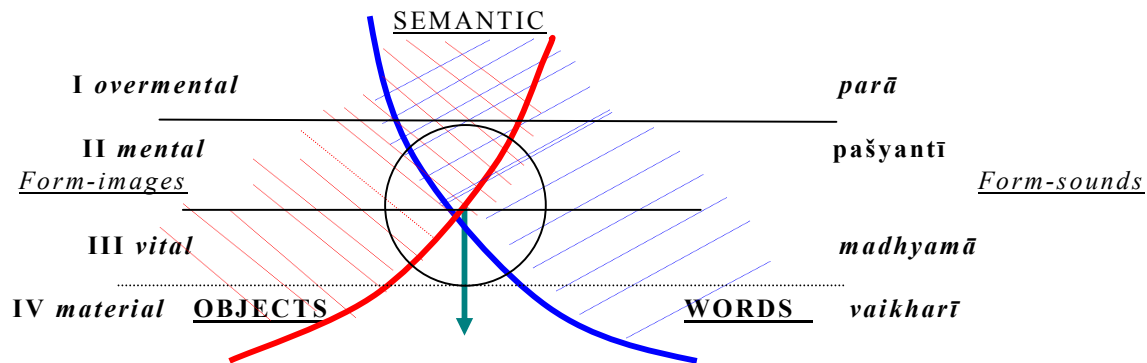
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<sup>20</sup> The Upanishads, p.126



There are two, which seem to be different, realities interconnected into one complex objective-subjective reality of the consciousness in its double status of *cognition* (the perceptive reality or sense) and that of *power* (the objective reality or the object of sense).

On the highest level of consciousness, where the power and knowledge are one, there is no difference between the objective and subjective realities. The idea-force, the idea-vibration is one for the *word* and the *object*. The semantic of both is one and the same. So the semantic of the objective thing "book" and of the objective word "a book" must be the same.

It is on the level of formations (mental and vital planes), that we see the expressed and expressive elements (*vācya* and *vācaka*) split into their different shapes: the form of the *object* and the form of the *word*. Being still similar in their semantic they differ in their shapes: an *idea-form*, as a *thought-sound* (a word), is not the same as a *thought-image* (a form).

The circle in the centre is a symbol of formation and formulation, which includes all possible interactions: (1) the oneness of meaning; (2) the difference in *form* (cp.: *nāma* and *rūpa*), and (3) on the material plane the word and the object are absolutely separate things. This scheme is meant to help us to approach the subject. It is only a scheme, and should be understood only as such.

The hearing and sight, *śrotram* and *cakṣus*, together with the speech and mind, *vāc* and *manas*, were considered by Upanishads as four pillars on which *brahma-catuṣpād*, "the Spirit on four legs", stands firmly in the world (ChUp, BrhUp) as *prāṇa*, Life energy. It is with a help of these *nāma* and *rūpa*, *Name* and *Form*, that Brahman, the Creator, could enter into his creation according to the Shatapatha Brahmana. In the Vedas these *nāma* and *rūpa* are presented as *śruti* and *dṛṣṭi*, (cp.: *cit-tapas*, Consciousness-Power, in the Puranas).

This interrelation between the Name and the Form, the Sense and the object of sense, Sri Aurobindo explains in defining the essential sense Samjñana:

"Everything begins with vibration or movement, the original *kṣobha* or disturbance. If there is no movement of the conscious being, it can only know its own pure static existence. Without vibration or movement of

being in consciousness there can be no act of knowledge and therefore sense; without vibration or movement of being in force there can be no object of sense. Movement of conscious being as knowledge becoming sensible of itself as movement of force, in other words the knowledge separating itself from its own working to watch that and take it into itself again by feeling, - this is the basis of universal Sanjnana. This is true both of our internal and external operations."<sup>21</sup>

Sri Aurobindo writes about Mantra: "A supreme, an absolute of itself, a reaching to an infinite and utmost, a last point of perfection of its own possibilities is that to which all action of Nature intuitively tends in its unconscious formations and when it has arrived to that point it has justified its existence to the spirit which has created it and fulfilled the secret creative will within it. Speech, the expressive Word, has such a summit or absolute, a perfection which is the touch of the infinite upon its finite possibilities and seal upon it of its Creator. ... the Mantra is the word that carries the godhead in it or the power of the godhead, can bring it into the consciousness and fix there it and its workings, awaken there the thrill of the infinite, the force of something absolute, perpetuate the miracle of the supreme utterance. This highest power of speech and especially of poetic speech is what we have to make here the object of our scrutiny, discover, ..."<sup>22</sup>

Sri Aurobindo in his "Savitri", in "The Book of Birth and Quest", Canto Three "The Call to the Quest" depicts an experience of the transcendental Speech.

"This word was seed of all the thing to be.  
 A hand from some Greatness opened her heart's locked doors  
 And showed the work for which her strength was born.  
 As when the mantra sinks in Yoga's ear,  
 Its message enters stirring the blind brain  
 And keeps in the dim ignorant cells its sound;  
 The hearer understands a form of words  
 And, musing on the index thought it holds,  
 He strives to read it with the labouring mind,  
 But finds bright hints, not the embodied truth:  
 Then, falling silent in himself to know  
 He meets the deeper listening of his soul:  
 The Word repeats itself in rhythmic strains:  
 Thought, vision, feeling, sense, the body's self  
 Are seized unalterably and he endures

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<sup>21</sup> The Upanishads, p.196

<sup>22</sup> Sri Aurobindo, Archives and Research, April 1979, v.3, No 1, p.19

An ecstasy and an immortal change;  
 He feels the Wideness and becomes a Power,  
 All knowledge rushes on him like a sea:  
 Transmuted by the white spiritual ray  
 He walks in naked heavens of joy and calm,  
 Sees the God-face and hears transcendent speech:  
 An equal greatness in her life was sown." <sup>23</sup>

### On the Vedic Usage of the Word.

Sri Aurobindo writes in the Secret of the Veda about the hymns and their utility:

"The hymns possess indeed a finished metrical form, a constant subtlety and skill in their technique, great variations of style and poetical personality; they are not the work of rude, barbarous and primitive craftsmen, but the living breath of a supreme and conscious Art forming its creations in the puissant but well-governed movement of a self-observing inspiration. Still, all these high gifts have deliberately been exercised within one unvarying framework and always with the same materials. For the art of expression was to the Rishis only a means, not an aim; their principal preoccupation was strenuously practical, almost utilitarian, in the highest sense of utility. The hymn was to the Rishi who composed it a means of spiritual progress for himself and for others. It rose out of his soul, it became a power of his mind, it was the vehicle of his self-expression in some important or even critical moment of his life's inner history. It helped him to express the god in him, to destroy the devourer, the expresser of evil; it became a weapon in the hands of the Aryan striver after perfection, it flashed forth like Indra's lightning against the Coverer on the slopes, the Wolf on the path, the Robber by the streams." <sup>24</sup>

Let us have a look how these hymns were used for the "spiritual progress" by post Vedic tradition.

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<sup>23</sup> Savitri, p. 375

<sup>24</sup> The Secret of the Veda, p.11

Vedic Self-learning *svādhyāya* or *jñāna-yajña* as a means of growth of consciousness.

šreyān dravyamayād yajñāj jñāna-yajñam parantapa  
sarvam karmākhilam pārtha jñāne parisamāpyate  
                    api ced asi pāpebhyaḥ sarvebhyaḥ pāpakṛttamaḥ  
                    sarvam jñāna-plavenaiva vṛjinam santariṣyasi  
yathaidhānsi samiddho `gnir bhasmasāt kurute `rjuna  
jñānāgniḥ sarva-karmāṇi bhasmasāt kurute tathā <sup>25</sup>

*"The sacrifice by knowledge is greater than by any material means,  
O Arjuna. For all actions end in knowledge-experience!  
Even if you are the most sinful in the world,  
By the boat of knowledge you can overcome the misfortune of sin.  
Like a flaming fire burns to ashes all the fuel,  
the fire of knowledge burns to ashes all the actions!"*

This Sacrifice by Knowledge, *jñāna-yajña*, which Sri Krishna speaks so highly about, he calls also *svādhyāya*:- *svādhyāya-jñāna-yajñāś ca*.<sup>26</sup> Let us examine the term *svādhyāya*- and how it was used in the Vedic and Vedantic tradition. *Svādhyāya*- literally means self-learning or reading for oneself: *svādhyāya*-. It is a kind of recitation which one does for oneself as a means of spiritual quest, searching after the spiritual knowledge-realisation. It was of a sacrificial and meditative nature, different from the *pada-pāṭha*- and *krama-pāṭha*- recitations which were meant to preserve the Vedic text as such. In order to understand how *svādhyāya* works we should take a brief look into the general idea of Vedic sacrifice, its concept and functions.

So, from the time of late Brahmanas and Aranyakas (1000 B.C.) the reflection of the mind on the ancient Mysteries was already taking place. Though Brahmanas and Aranyakas were meant to explain the Samhitas in terms of ritual, their authors were fully aware of the true value of the knowledge embodied in the primary text. Thus at the end of nearly every passage they uttered the formula: *ya evam veda*, " the one who knows thus"... , he verily gets the fruit of the sacrifice etc. It was no longer pure ritual that was absolutely important for the performance of the sacrifice, but the text as such (*vāc*) and the understanding of its significance (*artha*-). This was probably a step away from the pure ritualism, if such stage at all occurred, towards the symbolic ritualism from the time as early as the Taittiriya Samhita can be dated. This symbolic ritualism was developed even farther in the Aranyakas and Upanishads. It has become a pure symbolism, still using its formula, *ya evam veda*, indicating that

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<sup>25</sup> BhG 4, 33-37

<sup>26</sup> BhG 4.28

the reading and understanding of it were considered to be equal to the performance of the sacrifice.

Later on, and especially in the medieval period of Indian history, reading a text even without understanding, was considered to be sufficient and as such was supposed to bring a sacrificial gift. This gradation from the so called pure ritualism via symbolism to the textual ritualism covers all possible approaches to the text in general.

Let us now have a look into the general structure and principles of the Vedic ritual. The Aitareya Brahmana<sup>27</sup> depicts the structure of the Vedic ritual, agni-hotra, as consisting of three priests: *hotar*, *adhvaryu* and *udgatar*, reciting texts from Rik, Yajur and Sama Vedas, corresponding to the three regions: earth, air, and heaven, respectively. The fourth priest is *brahman*, who is silent during the performance, observing all the actions as well as listening to all the words uttered by the other three priests. His function is to be a witness of all that is happening and in case of any imperfection in action or in speech he has to correct it in his mind (prāyaścitta-).

When the performance of the sacrifice is over, and the *dakṣiṇa*-, the money and wealth is distributed among the priests, half of it is given to the three priests:

*hotar*, *adhvaryu* and *udgatar*, and the other half to *brahman* alone. So the one who does practically nothing - says AitBr in dispute - gets the same dakshina as the other three who recited and performed all the sacrifice. Why is it so?

The text then explains that the first three priests represent Vāc, Speech, belonging to the Earth, (of which, according to other Vedic texts, Agni is the essence (cp: ChUp etc.), while *brahman* represents Manas, Mind, belonging to the Heaven, of which Surya is the essence. And by this Speech and Mind, earth and heaven, they create the space in between: Prana, Life-Energy, belonging to Antariksha, the middle world, of which Vayu is the essence. Therefore, says the text, this Vayu Pavamana is the Yajna.<sup>28</sup>

This general scheme of the ritual is very important for us if we want to better understand its symbolism. Agni, the lower pole, and Surya, the upper pole, create the energetic field in between which is Vayu, or the Yajna.

The same ritualistic structure is also maintained in Svadhyaya, where the reader of the text, which he knows perfectly by heart, utters it, so to say, in mechanical way, while the other his part: manas, mind, is observing the flow of the words and thus, being detached from the active formulation of the text, becomes simply a witness of the text - like the *brahman* priest. When these conditions of the sacrificial act are

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<sup>27</sup> AitBr 25.7

<sup>28</sup> AitBr 25, 8-9

maintained then reader himself becomes an altar, or to be more precise, his life-energy Prana. In this way he unites and becomes one with all the levels: heaven (mind), earth (word) and space in-between (breath).

In Taittiriya Aranyaka Rishi exclaims:

āpam āpām apaḥ sarvāḥ asmād asmād ito `mutaḥ  
agnir vāyuṣ ca sūryaṣ ca saha sañcaskara-rddhiyā

"I have gathered all nourishing powers of Consciousness, from here, from there and from beyond; Agni and Vayu and Surya! I have combined for the Growth!"<sup>29</sup>

This union of all the levels of existence from below and from above is the key to the concept of sacrifice. It is to be done for the Universal and the Individual Growth, the condition of which is a simultaneous and united existence with Agni, Vayu and Surya.

tasmāt svādhyāyo `dhyetavyo yaṃ kratum adhīte  
tena tenāsyēṣṭaṃ bhavaty agner vāyor ādityasya sāyujyaṃ gacchati

"Therefore Svadhyaya should be learned, for whatever he reads about any action, by that (reading) he fulfills the desired, (and) moves towards union with Agni, Vayu and Aditya."<sup>30</sup>

Svadhyaya is called in the texts brahma-yajña. It is distinguished from other kinds of sacrifice. The text says that there are five great sacrifices - to gods, to ancestors, to spirits, to men and to Brahman.<sup>31</sup> And it continues - "when one puts into the fire only fuel, it is already a deva-yajña; when one offers to the ancestors only water, exclaiming Svadha, it is already a pitṛ-yajña; when one makes even a little offering from his food to the spirits, then it is already a bhūta-yajña; when one gives food to brahmanas, then it is already a manuṣya-yajña; but when one reads

<sup>29</sup> TaitAr 1.1.1,2

<sup>30</sup> There is an interesting comment of Sayana to these verses:

trividho hi yāgaḥ kāyiko vāciko mānasaṣceti, tatrādhyetur vācikasya niṣpattau nāstyeva vivādaḥ, yady adhyetārtham api jānāti tadādhyayanakāle tadanusaṃdhānān mānaso `pi niṣpadyate, kāyikaṣ cennāsti māstu nāma., yasya tvadhikāra kāyikam apyasau karotv-itarasya tu vācikenaiwa tatphalam labhyate, tasmād ayam adhyetāgnyādīnām sāyujyam gacchati/

"The Sacrifice is of three kinds: by bodily action, by word and by mind. There is no discussion how it is done by the word, (for it is understood). But when the reader knows also the meaning (of the words) then in the moment of reading them, the mental kind of sacrifice is following automatically, and even if there is not bodily action occurring in the performance, it does not matter at all, ... only the one, who by prescription was to perform the bodily part of the sacrifice should do it, otherwise any other one gains the same fruit of the sacrifice by reciting the text of it. Thus the reader moves towards the union with Agni, Vayu and Aditya."

<sup>31</sup> pañca vā ete mahāyajñāḥ deva-yajñāḥ pitṛ-yajñāḥ bhūta-yajño manuṣya-yajño brahma-yajña iti



for oneself even one verse from Rigveda, Yajurveda or Samaveda, then the brahma-yajña is performed."<sup>32</sup>

Svadhya is depicted in the myth of TaitAr as a sacrificial act done by Rishis, who by desiring *yajña* - received it from Brahma Svayambhu. And by performing it they made gods again sinless (*apahata-pāpmānaḥ*), who thus went back to heaven (*svargaṃ lokam āyan*) and the Rishis themselves joined the abode of Brahman (*brahmaṇaḥ sāyujyam ṛṣayo 'gacchan*).<sup>33</sup>

In order to explain better why the Svadhya has such power, the TaitAr quotes the texts from Rig Veda:

ṛco akṣare parame vyoman yasmin devā adhi viśve niṣedur  
yas tan na veda kim ṛcā kariṣyati ya it tad vidus ta ime samāsata iti

"The sacred verses are in the highest heaven, where all gods abide. He, who does not know that, what is he going to do with that sacred Speech? Those, indeed, who know that, they are perfectly united!"<sup>34</sup>

Later the text says: *yāvatīr vai devatāḥ tāḥ sarvā vedavidī brāhmaṇe vasanti*, "All gods as they are, live in the brahman, who knows Vedas!"<sup>35</sup>. Sayana comments that they live in man, brahman, because of him reciting and understanding the Vedic mantras, (*pāṭhato'rthataśca*). And since the mantras exist in the Speech of the reader and in the Mind of the knower, (*mantrāḥ sarve 'dhyetur vāci veditur manasi ca vartante*), all gods therefore also live in him, procreated, or more precisely, given a life-space by those mantras (*ekaikasmin mantra ekaiko devaḥ pratipādyate*).

Here we find, I think, the final explanation of the *svādhyāya* or *jñāna-yajña*, it is to give a space in ones own consciousness for the forces, which have to come through the process of sounding the text connected with them, and by observing its meaning silently, giving it a possibility to be fully expressed, in terms of experience.

It is quite interesting to note that the Mother suggested a similar method for reading Sri Aurobindo's Savitri. It is to be very still and peaceful and to let the text sink down into the depth of consciousness. The text itself has a transformative power and will build in time a proper understanding of itself in our consciousness.

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<sup>32</sup> TaitAr 2.10

<sup>33</sup> TaitAr 2.9

<sup>34</sup> TaitAr 2.11

<sup>35</sup> TaitAr 2.15.1

### The Post Vedic Thought.

Now we will have to review what has happened in the post Vedic period in regard to the concept of the Word, how it has changed in comparison to the Vedic view and why. This period is marked by the fundamental question of relation of the word to its meaning: the studies of semantic, since it got separated from it by the mental structure of grammatical categories, and the word got a tendency to harden into its precise and rigid form, representing a particular formation of the mind, a concept.

#### *Semantic levels of the Word and the functions of language.*

Modern Theoretical Linguistics recognizes three levels of meaning in any word or text: Semantic, Syntactic and Pragmatic; and these three levels also constitute the branches of a new science called Semiotics. By defining a hierarchy of meaning, Semiotics also determines the functions of language in general.

The pragmatic level of meaning goes beyond the text itself, aiming at life and its objective context, of which the text is only an indicator. It reflects the most external function of the Word<sup>36</sup> and indicates its communicative aspect.

The syntactic level introduces a meaning of the text itself, its between-words semantic, and thus reflects the structural or grammatical function of each word and the text in general - a cognitive aspect of language.<sup>37</sup>

The semantic level of the word is oriented to its origin, an etymon, a simple root-sound, representing its creative potential. However, the creative function of the etymon has not yet been recognized by modern science, which sees the creativity of a word as lying mainly in its communicative function. The semantic itself is not seen in the system of original etymological meanings but as a relation of the signs with the things they denote.

In Vedic times (2000 BC) the creative aspect of speech was seen to be of major importance, so that the study of language was based entirely on this knowledge-experience and was therefore devoted mainly to this direction of thought<sup>38</sup>.

But in time this experience was lost and the memory of this knowledge no longer appeared satisfying to the intellect, which is always seeking a new and authentic experience. So from the time of Yaska and Panini (6th century BC) onwards, a growing interest was taken in the cognitive and

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<sup>36</sup> By 'Word' we mean a creative and self-cognitive faculty of Consciousness, different from its other faculties: Mind, Vision and Hearing.

<sup>37</sup> Concept of 'sign' of Saussure, or 'trace-structure' of Derrida.

<sup>38</sup> Cp. RV 10.125

communicative aspects of language, which had not been studied earlier. This was a flourishing time in grammatical thought and the philosophy of language, when great treatises on Etymology and Grammar such as the Nirukta of Yaska (6th c. BC), Ashtadhyayi of Panini (5th c. BC), the Vartikas of Katyayana (4th c. BC), Mahabhashya of Patanjali (2nd c. BC), and Bhartrihari's Vakyapadiya (1st c. AD) were composed.

Here we would like to note briefly some of the important views on the Semantic issues dealt with and expressed in these treatises, because of their closeness to the Vedic period and the transition they represent from the old to the new paradigm of the Word.

Yaska's discussion of the meaning of a word in relation to objective reality:<sup>39</sup>

The arguments of a critic are given as follows:

- 1) every being should be called by the same name when performing the same action, so if aśva-, "horse", means "running", than everyone who is running should be called aśva-;
- 2) every object should be called by as many names as actions are performed by it; for the designation of an object is anyhow not clear when it is determined only by its action, for it can perform any action, and exists in itself before and after the action;<sup>40</sup>

Yaska answers:

- 1) not everyone gets the same name by performing the same action, not everyone who cuts wood is called takṣan-, "a carpenter", but only one who does it often and regularly;
- 2) though one is involved in many different activities, one gets his name from a particular action only. There are even many things which get their names from their subsequent actions.<sup>41</sup>

What we see here is that a critic by his arguments is trying to identify the image created by a word as it functions in linguistic reality with the image of an object as it functions in objective reality. He wants to establish a true correspondence between these two levels of reality, one of which lies beyond time and space<sup>42</sup>, in the subjective realms, and the

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39 Nirukta 1,12-14: yaḥ kaś ca tat karma kuryāt sarvam tat sattvam tathā ācakṣīran / yaḥ kaś ca adhvānam aśnūvīta, aśvaḥ sa vacanīyaḥ syāt/ atha api cet sarvāṇyākhyātājāni nāmāni syuḥ / ...

<sup>40</sup> Actually these arguments show that the understanding of the word was not 'logocentric' in India, for the difference between the signified and signifier was clearly perceived.

<sup>41</sup> Nirukta 1.14. The relativity of application of name to the objective reality is clearly stated here.

<sup>42</sup> I think, that linguistic reality, the reality of structural semantic as well as of the 'signified', can be said to lie beyond the objective time and space; "*signified*" is beyond actual time, 'it is never there' by Derrida's definition, and the "*signifier* is always in time and space, but 'it is never that'. For it evidently belongs to a different order of time and space than physical reality, though still it belongs simultaneously to the realm of 'manifestation', and exists in a subtle space and time.

other - in the objective time and space. The critic seems to understand the problem very well when he says that an object cannot be defined by a word, for it exists before and after the action that the word indicates.<sup>43</sup> But we may say that the word persists in its own reality beyond the reality of time and space. Since we live, act, see, understand the world using our linguistic reality, the name once given to the object, whether it was relevant or seemed to be relevant for a particular speaker, could remain for some time, even if it had very little to do with any action of the object. The reason why this or that name was given to the object was not in order to satisfy an objective reality but rather a subjective one; it was named by a speaker imposing his wish, opinion, knowledge, will on the object. Once the name has been used, it would persist in memory until a new name effaces or changes it.

Yaska only emphasizes the difference between these two realities, as well as pointing to the corrupted and conventional character of the word, without answering the critic's argument about the approximate character of definition itself. It is interesting to see these two views representing the transition from the Vedic understanding of the Word, based on transparent etymology,<sup>44</sup> which was now already becoming obscure and non-functional in the consciousness of a speaker, to the beginning of a new reasoning approach. The critic's arguments sound childish to the reason, because they are still focusing on the inner source of words, while the reason focuses on observing their outer applications. Answering the question of how an object could be called by a certain name, when it is performing a different action than that indicated by the name, Durga, commenting on the Nirukta, says: "śabda-niyamaḥ svabhāvata eva loke", "in spoken language [in the world], the law of using the word follows its [the word's] own nature". According to him, this svabhāva- is an inherent characteristic of the word as a sound-meaningful entity. It has its own existence and can therefore be applied to any object at will by a speaker, thus creating a new contextual meaning, for the word in its semantic aspect continues to carry its own significance.

The word "carpenter" then, in the pragmatic sense, means a distinctive skill and style of living in a society. So when a speaker wants to denote this complex of knowledge-ability-life-style-activity by one word, he says: a carpenter. But in the linguistic reality this word does not refer to any particular carpenter, or a real person;<sup>45</sup> it evokes only an idea of someone who cuts wood for his living (pragmatic sense); at the same

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<sup>43</sup> The phenomenological treatment, see also Nietzsche's levels of metaphors.

<sup>44</sup> When the etymology of the word is transparent then the other meaning is known: the meaning-sound, the meaning-power. Therefore in the old times the names were kept secretly, for they were a key to the essence of the being. Cf.: Kena Up., etc.

<sup>45</sup> Cp. with 'a signified', a concept;

time it includes the formal semantic of the grammatical usage of the word (syntactic sense) - that is, how the word is used in relation to other words in grammatical structures;<sup>46</sup> and above all it has its own hidden source of meaning - an etymon in the system of seed-sounds.<sup>47</sup>

When Durga says that word lives and acts in the world according to its own nature, he implies that any word not only reflects an image of objective reality but also introduces and implements an image of its own. For the hidden system of etymons (Semantics) and the relation of the word with other possible words in the system of language (Syntactics) influences the general contextual meaning on the pragmatic level. Therefore even on the purely communicational level the word acts as a meaningful entity, influencing and creating the society of man, which is nothing but a product of this communication.<sup>48</sup>

"He spoke in sentences from the unseen Heights.  
A casual passing phrase can change our life.  
For the hidden prompters of our speech sometimes  
Can use the formulas of a moment's mood  
To weigh unconscious lips with words of Fate."<sup>49</sup>

### *Patanjali and the Syntactic aspect of the word.*

Patanjali in his Mahabhashya, the commentary on Panini's Ashtadhyayi, says that in order to know the meaning of a word one has to go not to the learned linguist, but to the market place, for the meaning of the word in its natural usage differs from the linguistic one. The life which the word as a 'signifier' has in the world is different from the conceptual or 'signified' part of it. This was a new approach to the human tongue in comparison to the Vedic theories of the origins of speech. Patanjali points out to a different value of speech, which had not been focused on before: a communicative aspect and the life of a 'signifier' in relation to the 'signified'.

Here I would like to quote one example, where Patanjali is discussing the topic of the simplest meaningful units, which is similar to the modern understanding of linguistics in regard to phoneme:<sup>50</sup>

There are three words kūpa-, a well, sūpa-, a soup, yūpa-, a sacrificial post, which differ in their first phonemes; therefore, concludes Patanjali,

<sup>46</sup> Cp. with Chomsky's generative grammar.

<sup>47</sup> About which nobody speaks in the West, taking mistakenly the structural semantic, 'sign' or 'trace', for the meaning itself.

<sup>48</sup> This much is obvious even to modern science, but not connected with the etymon level.

<sup>49</sup> Savitri, p. 373

<sup>50</sup> Mbh, V 1, pp 31-32: anarthakās tu varṇāḥ/ ... na hi prativarṇam arhā upalabhyante/ "the phonemes are meaningless ... it is not from the phonemes that the meaning is gathered...."

the k-, s-, y- are meaningful units, for these words are distinguished by their initial phonemes. But at the same time the meaning cannot be learned from these in isolation: k-, s-, y-; while the part -ūpa- is also meaningless alone. Thus Patanjali admits that phonemes have a differentiating significance within the units which bear the meaning.<sup>51</sup> Such a unit he considers to be saṅghāta-, a single entity which is 'indivisible and one', it can be a word or a text. Patanjali here compares it to a chariot, as a single entity which consists of many parts that are incapable of moving, while the chariot as a whole is an entity which can move.<sup>52</sup> The sound of the word or a text is simultaneous in the mind of the speaker but it has to be pronounced in time and space and therefore it creates an illusion of the significance of the components.<sup>53</sup>

There are few remarks which I would like to make to clarify the shift from the Vedic intuitive approach to the mental and analyzing approach to the word.

Patanjali tries to discover the semantics of the word in a purely syntactic way, breaking up the semantic entity of the etymon into a formal, structural succession of sounds, presuming that they should be meaningful as such. This approach does not help us much, although it brings some clarity about how the etymon is to be approached - as a syllable only. If we examine carefully the nature of the sounds in speech, we will see that k- is not a sound, but only an articulating device, which can be meaningful only when a vowel sound is there, forming it into a syllable<sup>54</sup>. Of course it reflects the significance of its place of articulation, but in itself it has no sound, and cannot be pronounced. So kū is to be compared, which differs from sū and yū not only in form, but also in sense, at the primal layer of meaning. Thus a prototypal and original root *kū* has many parallels in other Indo-European languages: Engl., "cave" see also Lat.; Russ., "ko-p-aty" to dig; Engl. "cup", etc. *Sū*, is "to press out a juice", so *sū-pa-* is a "soup" in English, "sup" in Russian, etc., also *soma-*, the "ambrosia", and *sū-nu-*, the "son", as a carrier of the essence. The root *yū* thus gives us different meanings: *to unite* and *to divide*, in other words *to hold the two in one*. From this root we have many derivatives: *yuj*, *to unite, to bind, to fix, to use* etc., *yuga-*, "pair"; cp: Engl. "yoke"; *yoga-*, "union"; *yūpa*, "sacrificial post", where the sacrificial animal is to be tied up.

The "single entity" of which Patanjali speaks should belong to the origins of the word, to its inherent and hidden semantic, - an etymon, and not to its conventional significance, supported by the mind examining the syntactic structure of the word.

<sup>51</sup> Saussure's fundamental discovery.

<sup>52</sup> It is a clear example of introduction of semantic into syntactic use: Sphota.

<sup>53</sup> Patanjali on the rule of Panini 1.4.109, p.356.

<sup>54</sup> Not all human languages function syllabically, or even vocally. Isolated and Hieroglyphic types are based on vision rather than sound. Languages of the numbers, geometrical figures or colors are of the sight origin.

But what is interesting that Patanjali for the first time proposes three different approaches in the studies of speech-utterance:

1), meaningful word;

2) dhvani, an uttered sound;

3) sphaṭaśabdaḥ, an impression of the sound in the mind.

So the meaningful word, arthasampratyāyakaḥ śabdaḥ, is perceived through the articulate sound, dhvani, by the listener as sphaṭaśabdaḥ.

This was the beginning of the Sphaṭa theory.<sup>55</sup>

### Bhartrihari and the Theory of Sphota

Developing the thought of Patanjali, Bhartrihari goes farther and makes an overall survey of what is "single entity" and how it works on all levels of speech. For Bhartrihari a sentence and not a separate word is a single undivided speech-unit. The whole world as it is has a Meaning which can be grasped only as an indivisible unity. This meaning is inherent in the consciousness of man from his very birth, with which he later finds its partial correspondence in his language<sup>56</sup> and reproduces it through articulation, and that is Sphaṭa.

Sphaṭa, literally means "sudden opening", "disclosure", it is taking place in both speaker and hearer, through the process of articulation in both. The sound of the speech (dhvani) simply evokes the Sphaṭa in the hearer, as varṇa-sphaṭa, pada-sphaṭa and vākya-sphaṭa, the phoneme/morpheme-articulation-cognition, the word-articulation-cognition and the text-articulation-cognition, respectively. The differentiation between sound and articulation is one of the fundamental features of the theory of Sphaṭa. Sphaṭa is not a sound we hear but the sound we articulate.<sup>57</sup> According to Bhartrihari Sphaṭa operates within universal sounds whereas dhvani within a particular sound. The opposition between sphaṭa and dhvani is also presented as the opposition of class to individual. In modern terms Sphaṭa can be understood as having constant distinctive phonetic features, whereas dhvani is of a phonic nature. Sphaṭa is that which is to be manifested (vyaṅgya-), and the dhvani is manifesting (vyañjaka-). Sphaṭa is not uttered but it is perceived by the hearer.

To make the distinction clearer Bhartrihari introduces two types of dhvani: prākṛta-dhvani, natural sound, and vaikṛta-dhvani, uttered out or distorted sound; where sphaṭa is revealed through the former one only.

<sup>55</sup> This view of Patanjali most probably belongs to the linguistic tradition about which we don't have any earlier evidences. Panini though mentions in his Aṣṭādhyāyī the name of Sphaṭāyana among ancient grammarians, which may be the reference to this particular theory.

<sup>56</sup> Therefore a foreign language can be studied, for any language is only a particular access to the Reality, which is wider than any language.

<sup>57</sup> It is Saussure's definition of 'signifier'.

The secondary vaikṛta sounds are only to indicate the primary ones, and thus to kindle up the Sphoṭa, which with a help of pratibhā, the flash of insight, reveals the meaning of the text.

On semantic level, as it was developed by latter grammarians, Sphoṭa makes the text correspond with a universal Text-Totality, śabda-brahman, and therefore the text can be easily understood as such. And once the inner perception (pratibhā) of the hearer flashes out, reflecting something from that totality, the Sphoṭa, the revelation of the meaning of the text, takes place in his consciousness.

So, the Sphoṭa can be seen as a communication-device based on a recognition of the truth of existence through a word/text in the hearer-speaker, (sattā). It therefore is of a psychological nature, as any human speech is, for the recognition of the meaning of the text is perceived by a consciousness which lies beyond the analytic capacity of the external mind, and carries in itself all meanings; and as such, its proper understanding requires a psychological experience.

Even today this theory is widely recognised among modern linguists as the most complete investigation into the profundities of language, making a considerable contribution to the Philosophy of Language, the Psychology of Speech, and especially Semiotics.

### General overview of all major theories of Sphota:

The general overview of the concepts and different approaches to Sphota must be made here in order to show the richness and the precision of the topics being discussed among ancient and medieval grammarians in India. There are eight major approaches to the theory of Sphota:

- 1) varṇa-sphoṭa
- 2) pada-sphoṭa
- 3) vākya-sphoṭa
- 4) akhaṇḍa-pada-sphoṭa
- 5) akhaṇḍa-vākya-sphoṭa
- 6) varṇa-jāti-sphoṭa
- 7) pada-jāti-sphoṭa
- 8) vākya-jāti-sphoṭa

Here we will briefly outline some of their central concepts and issues, especially related to the studies of meaning:

1) *Varna sphota* is defined as denotative, vācaka, when a single phoneme or a stem or affix is found to be so, and therefore the varṇa-sphota is taking place. This theory utilizes the analysis from 'bottom-to-top', which is mainly found in grammatical treatises such as Panini's descriptive grammar.



Varna sphota has its difficulties in the immediate application to the analysis of the word, especially when the synthetic forms of the word are examined such as ghaṭena, 'with the pot', for it cannot clearly define them into separate and meaningful units.<sup>58</sup>

2) *Pada sphota* maintains that the finished word as a unique entity conveys the meaning, and the division into the morphological components into suffixes, stems etc. does not occur when the speaker or the listener understands the speech. This theory claims that the text can be described by listening to the words and their meaning, as well as by perceiving the relation between them in a syntactic structure of the sentence. It is by listening to the meaning of every word and linking it with another word that the meaning of the sentence can be understood. But since the meaning of the sentence is the final meaning which is to be understood then the pada-sphota theory is found insufficient in the description of perception of meaning and leads to the next level of synthesis: vākyasphoṭa.

3) *Vākya-sphota* maintains that the sentence is a unique entity which conveys the meaning. The sentence in itself is a unit of meaning. Vakya sphota however does not claim that the constituents of the sentence do not have meaning. The main point of this theory is that the word should be always seen and understood in a context. The words have their meaning only when they form a part of sentence.

4) *Akhaṇḍa-pada-sphoṭa* maintains that the word is perceived as undivided single meaning bearing unit. It is not perceived by its parts: suffixes, stems etc., but as a single and undivided meaningful entity.

5) *Akhaṇḍa-vākya-sphoṭa* says that it is insufficient to perceive the separate word, for in ordinary communications the sentence as the whole is perceived as meaningful and not a separate word. Bhartrihari thinks that such division of the sentence into words and stems etc., does not exist in the ordinary perception of speech. In common use of speech the meaning is taken as a whole, including the context. It is only when the utterance is made that the speaker can dwell on it and analyze it in parts as words, stems etc., but not when he is speaking. And if he is able to grasp the parts of speech, such as syllables, he will lose the meaning of it all. According to this theory the varna and pada sphota describe language in its functions, but not in its use.

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<sup>58</sup> Where the stem ends and suffix begins in this word? Is it ena, or ina, or na? And still it is none of them. So what is then this na- or ina-? It is a clear example of how the grammatical analysis is incapable to find out the meaning of grammatical units. It breaks down the oneness of the system of etymons into bits and pieces, demanding from every bit to be meaningful in itself without referring to its system of meaning.

### 6) Vyakti sphota and Jāti sphota

To answer the question whether Sphoṭa is particular or universal there are two theories the Vyakti-sphoṭa-vāda and Jāti sphoṭa-vāda.

The Jāti sphoṭa-vāda maintains that non-difference in the varied individual elements is generic, while vyakti-sphoṭa-vāda says that difference is associative. For the Jāti sphoṭa-vāda the meaning-bearing word is the class (as for instance: 'gotva', 'cowness') which is revealed by the individual instances (vyaktis). The individuals are not meaning bearers.<sup>59</sup>

There was one more distinction important to mention here, which formulated the two different approaches to the understanding of Sphota: the *abhihitānvayavāda* and *anvitābhīdhānavāda* theories.

The *abhihitānvayavāda* theory maintains that the words and grammatical units have their own meaning and by joining together through their syntactic relation build up the meaning of the sentence.

The *anvitābhīdhānavāda* theory on the contrary affirms that the meaning of the word can be understood only in the context of the sentence.

All these theories of Sphota with many other variations and commentaries make a rich layout for the linguistic studies of meaning in the terms of structural semantics, and together represent a holistic view in defining all possible approaches to meaning within the grammatical structures (morphology and syntax).

### The Four levels of Speech in Tantra.

Kashmirian Saiva tradition is utilising the Sphoṭa theory, and is trying to recapture the awareness of the Vedic Word, known in Tantra as Parā Vāk, which is seen as a part of the Supreme Consciousness, Cit. The studies of Linguistics was considered to be a path to liberation of Consciousness.<sup>60</sup>

Abhinavagupta following Bhartrihari and his own Tantric tradition defines the four levels of speech in his *Tantrāloka* in this way:<sup>61</sup>

"When she (parā vāk) is differentiating then she is known in three terms as paśyantī, madhyamā, and vaikharī."<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Against this Nāgeśa says that individual member is the meaning conveyor which is revealed by the individual sounds associated with diverse features.

<sup>60</sup> Similarly it was seen by Bhartrihari and other grammarians as a path to the liberation of Consciousness. In this regard it is interesting to mention the statements by Wilhelm Humboldt he made at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after discovering Sanskrit language, where he invites the scholars to see the studies of language as a way to increase mental capacities of men.

<sup>61</sup> TA 3.236, Bhartrihari speaks only about the three levels: paśyantī, madhyamā and vaikharī; but of course he speaks about śabda-brahman, VP 1.1.

<sup>62</sup> TA 3,236, and comm. vol. 2, pp 225-226

According to Abhinavagupta the differentiation on the phonemes, words and sentences is inherent in the paśyantī vāk.<sup>63</sup>

This definition is quite interesting for us, for we may find it fully corresponding with our scheme of the sign made earlier (see the chart of the sign).

Rāmakantha gives us a very valuable orientation commenting on Spandakārikāḥ<sup>64</sup>

Vaikharikā nāma kriyā jñānamayī bhavati madhyamā vāk/  
Icchā punaḥ paśyantī sūkṣmā sarvāsāṃ samarasā vṛttiḥ//<sup>65</sup>

"The speech is indeed an action, the mediating part of the Word is made of knowledge, the will is its visionary part, which is subtle and is common essence in all [of them]."

### Parā Vāk

Abhinavagupta describes the parā vāk as the transcendental Word, beyond creation, the very essence of the Supreme reality, ever-present and pervading all.<sup>66</sup> It is thus identical with pure consciousness, Cit, which is the ultimate reality. It is conceived of as a luminous vibration (sphurattā) of pure consciousness itself, carrying within itself the whole cosmic manifestation, which is shining within it without any differentiation.<sup>67</sup>

He also says that parā vāk "is indeed present on all the levels of paśyantī and others, for without her, darkness and unconsciousness, would prevail"<sup>68</sup>: paśyantīyādi daśasv api vastuto vyavasthitā tayā vinā paśyantīyādiṣu aprakāśatāpattīyā jaḍatāprasaṅgāt/

"Everything, stones, trees, birds, human beings, gods, demons and so on, is but the venerable Supreme [Word] present in and consisting of everything, in the form of (that is, identical with) the supreme Lord."<sup>69</sup>

<sup>63</sup> We will come back to this important point later when we will be discussing the connection of artha and vāk, for it is precisely because of this that the sound, vaikṛta dhvani, maintains its meaningful expression.

<sup>64</sup> SpK 4.18 (pp.149-151)

<sup>65</sup> It resembles the semantic levels in semiotics: pragmatics is vaikhari kriyā, syntactics is madhyamā jñāna, semantics is paśyantī icchā.

<sup>66</sup> PTV, p.13 satatodita, 'ever-active', 'eternally present',

<sup>67</sup> Cp. to Atharva Veda 1.1.1-4.

<sup>68</sup> PTV, p.5

<sup>69</sup> PTV, p. 188

ata eva sarve pāśāṅga-taru-tiryak-manuṣya-deva-rudra-kevali-mantra  
tadiṣatan maheśādikā ekaiva parābhāṣārikā-bhūmiḥ sarva-sarvātmanaiva  
parameśvara-rūpeṇāste.

This statement that Consciousness is pervading all the levels of creation and is an expression of all them is fundamental for Indian approach to language. And if this higher Consciousness would not be present within the creation, all would fall back into Inconscient. This view is clearly Vedic. The creation was conceived, according to the Veda, in two stages. First, out of himself the Supreme created all the worlds and then he entered them, ātmanātmānam abhisamviveśa.<sup>70</sup> So if he would withdraw his Consciousness, the luminous Word, the creation would again fall into the darkness.

Andre Padoux comments on the nature of the Supreme Word in his book *Vāc*:

"Thus we see the role played by the supreme level of the Word in this conception of the supreme consciousness. The letter is pure light, but in it the cosmos exists archetypically and undifferentiatedly prior to all manifestation: this results from its twin aspect of prakāśa and of vimarśa (or pratyavamarśa), that is, from its being both consciousness or light, and Word or, to say it differently, both pure, luminous (prakāśa), changeless consciousness and consciousness holding the paradigm of the cosmos in this Word which, as it were, whispers it to and within consciousness, and therefore makes it reflectively and introspectively aware – or brings about a representation (pratyavamarśa) of the cosmos."<sup>71</sup>

### **Paśyantī Vāk**

Abhinavagupta writes in his *Tantrāloka* 3.236:

paśyantī hi kriyā tasyā bhāgau pūrvāparau sthitau/  
etad draṣṭavyam ity etad vimarśaḥ pūrvato bhavet /

"Of that [parā vāk] the Seeing is indeed the active part. For She (parā vāk) has two parts: the first (its inner part) and the next (its outer part of manifestation).

<sup>70</sup> TaiAr, 23., Tait Up 2.6 etc. etc.

<sup>71</sup> Andre Padoux, *Vāc*, p. 177-178.

'This should be seen!' – thus the vimarṣa [power of parā vāk] reveals itself from its origin [in the form of paśyantī vāk]."<sup>72</sup>

So, the vimarṣa part of parā vāk becomes an active part or paśyantī vāk on the next level of manifestation. It is conceived as the first moment of wanting to know. It is of non-dualistic nature, where the division on subject and object is not yet been made:

na hi prathamajñānakāle bhedo `trāsphurat  
yatra vācyavācakaviśeṣayor abhedah /

'In this first moment of cognition there is no separation yet. There is no distinction between the signified and the signifier.'<sup>73</sup>

So paśyantī vāk can be described as a transition from the stage of a total undifferentiation to the stage of differentiation; the supreme-nonsupreme state of the Word, parāparā, which connects pure subjectivity with objectivity: ahantā with idantā ('I-ness' with 'This-ness'). These two coexist in her with predominance of the subjective aspect of 'I-ness', ahantā, which already on the madhyamā level will change and both will be equalized, as it were.

Now, what is a cause of paśyantī? How is it invoked, set into motion? The explanation given by Abhinavagupta is quite interesting:

tatas tu paśyantī yad yad abhīpsitam tat tad eva samucita-karaṇa-  
niyama-prabodhitam bodha-sūtraṇa-mātreṇa vimṛṣati/<sup>74</sup>

'Whatever is thus aspired or wished for is indeed awakened by the necessity of a certain action, and it is by only following that awareness that Paśyantī gets the perception of it [and is set into motion].'

Abhinavagupta compares it to a psychological process of memorizing (smṛti), by which certain events recall certain images which appear in the consciousness, as if they were caused by this will to know or the will to remember something which was as if forgotten.<sup>75</sup> Here we can clearly see that the agent provoking the paśyantī vāk is within man, it is his own aspiration towards knowing or perceiving, abhīpsitam.

<sup>72</sup> Cp. "The Supreme", - says the Mother, - "decided to exteriorise himself, objectivise himself, in order to have the joy of knowing himself in detail,... to be able to see Himself:- says the Mother. Questions and Answers, 16 October 1957, CWM, Vol.9, p.205-206

<sup>73</sup> PTV pp 4-5

<sup>74</sup> ibid

<sup>75</sup> This will to know, to remember, to recollect, is in some sense similar to the Nietzsche's idea of the will to know, will to power.

The power of will, *icchā śakti*, which is the very characteristic of the *paśyantī* is carrying within herself the power of cognition, *jñāna śakti*, and the power of action, *kriyā*.<sup>76</sup> In fact the will to be aware, *bubhutsā*, in its nature is awareness itself, *bodhasvabhāvā*, says Abhinavagupta.<sup>77</sup>

It is interesting to mention here how the hierarchy of *paśyantī vāk* is being defined. According to Abhinavagupta, there is always a greater will (*mahāpaśyantī*) and the smaller ones (*paśyantīs*). For instance:

'I go to the village', - says Abhinavagupta, - 'and it is my main will, *mahāpaśyantī*, but 'I am leaving my house' - is a smaller *paśyantī*. Similarly one should see the plane of *Sadāśiva* as a great *mahāpaśyantī* in comparison to which all other wills of individuals, being subjects to *Maya*, are smaller *paśyantīs*.<sup>78</sup> Moreover all the greater *mahāpaśyantīs* can finally be seen as those included into the supreme *paramahāpaśyantī*, which is *parā vāk* herself.

### **Madhyamā Vāk**

*Madhyamā*, literary means 'mediating', which mediates between the undifferentiated and the differentiated levels of the word. It is still a projection of the *parā vāk* together with *paśyantī*, only on this level the language finally appears as the division on phonemes, words and sentences. If on the level of *paśyantī* it was still involved, enclosed, as it were, *samvartita-*, then on the level of *madhyamā* it is unfolded into the mental distinct categories of language: grammar. It is on this level only that the distinction between *vācya-* and *vācaka-*, the signified and the signifier, takes place. Now when these two are combined as the substance of sound, being a material of language, the expressive and creative element, *vācaka*, and the creation, that which is to be expressed by it, the *vācya*, they together represent the power of the goddess called *parāparā*, Supreme-Nonesupreme, which is the essence of *Madhyamā Vāk*.

These two elements are aiming at two different things, one aiming at objective content, *idantā*, and the other oriented towards subjective expression of it *ahantā*, and thus they create the whole physical universe, *viśva*. The objective universe is born within and by the Word. On the individual level it is cognized as awareness in speech and language, as well as differentiation of *śabda* and *artha*, word and meaning. It is the level of Saussurean 'sign' and grammatical structure, which, according to him, is a proper subject of linguistics. The place of *madhyamā*, according to Abhinavagupta, is intellect, *buddhi*, where the

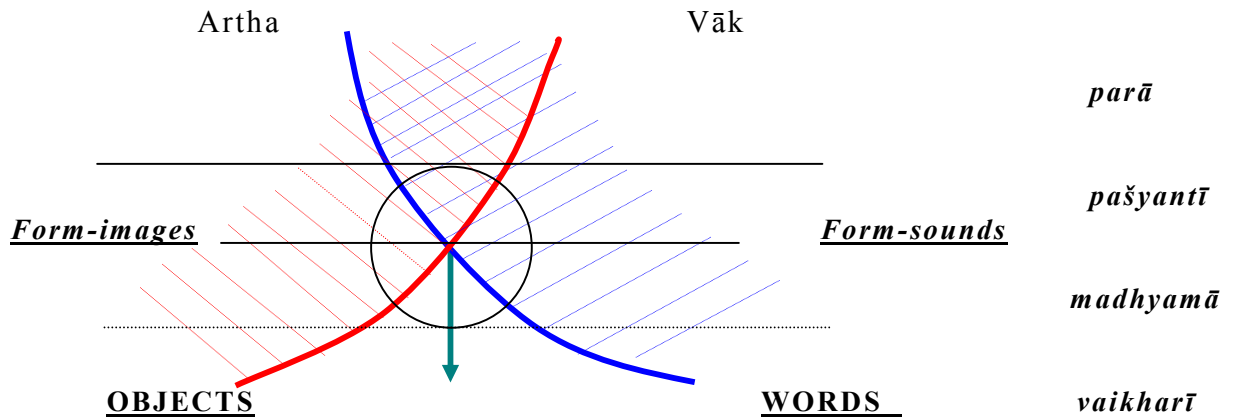
<sup>76</sup> IPVV, 1.5.13: *yad icchā-śaktir jñāna-kriyāśaktyor anugrahikā*

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, *bubhutsā api bodhasvabhāvaiva*

<sup>78</sup> IPVV 1.5.13: '*evaṃ grāmaṃ gacchāmi mahāpaśyantī, gṛhān nihsarāmi paśyantīm apekṣya tāvat yāvat sadāśiveśvaradaśā mahāpaśyantī...*'

element of impersonality still dominates the particularities of manifestation. It has a character of cognition: *jñāna-shakti-rūpā*,<sup>79</sup> and it utilizes the *Parāparā* Shakti, which dwells on the distinction of the subjective and objective content, of the infinite and the finite, of the transcendental and the non-transcendental. The objectivity is growing within the subject, as it were, and the subjectivity is still dominant.

Now when it comes to the level of *vaikharī*, the division on the *vācya* and *vācaka* elements becomes fixed by the cognitive aspect of *madhyamā*, where they are still superimposed on each other, therefore children, says Abhinavagupta, can learn language connected with objective reality.



### **Vaikhari Vak**

Vaikhari is a manifestation of speech in time and space with all the distinct features of language: phonemes, words and sentences. According to Abhinavagupta, the *vaikharī* is only a completion of the process of *parā vāk*, which started with *paśyantī* led through the formulation of the elements in the *madhyamā* and manifested in *vaikharī*. The *Parā Vāk* is present throughout the process of manifestation and always there before and after its manifestation. The Word is not only manifested in terms of the speech-production but also in terms of the objective reality.

This is, in brief, a grand vision of the Word in Kashmirian Shaivism.

<sup>79</sup> IPVV 1.5.13

## **A Conclusion**

The development of concept of the Word took several paradigm-shifts in the history of Indian thought starting from the Veda and ending with Tantra and Sri Aurobindo. It is only with Sri Aurobindo that the relevance of the Vedic and Tantric studies could take a positive direction for a modern research in the field of Linguistics. In his *Philological Interpretation of the Veda* and *The Origins of Aryan Speech* he makes a proposition to build a solid ground for the development of a true science of language.

The theory of transparent etymology which is emerging out of his proposition could be considered as the first step towards a new science of language, but in order to do it successfully it is necessary to change our view on language, from its present mental orientation to an inner, or rather a global one. This new view is based on another perception of meaning as derived not from the conventional usage of the word/text, but from its own depth, the system of etymons, seed-sounds. This could perhaps make our use of speech more conscious and more creative.

Such a change of consciousness involves other changes in the mind and senses, in order to be in tune with both the outer applications of the word and its inner domains, its true original meaning, which has a much greater creative power than is usually recognized.

The misinterpretation and misconception of etymology as a science today is based on a lack of systematic knowledge in this field, for it was built up only in the period of rational thinking, presuming that the meaning and the form of any particular etymon can exist independently from the rest of the system, like any separate word. Modern Linguists understands an etymon only as a parent of a word, which in time becomes detached from its source and lives its independent life, ignoring its origins as something already insignificant. The system of the primal roots is not considered as a meaningful whole, and the original roots are never examined systematically.

Sri Aurobindo's approach differs from these mental assumptions. It is seeking to discover and to differentiate the significance of the primary roots, not independently but on the basis of their position in the system, in terms of regular patterns of change in Phonetics, Morphology, Syntax, and Semantics. This kind of study can be undertaken only with a language which has preserved its own original system of etymons, and has a transparent derivative system of Grammar. And that is Sanskrit. No other language today can provide a sufficient field for such an investigation.