

**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> apīcyaṃ nāma, gūḍhaṃ 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 tád 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 akṣāre paramé víoman yásmin devā́ ádhi víśve niṣedúḥ  
yás tán ná véda kím r̥cā́ kariṣyati yá ít tád 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 manīṣiṇaḥ  
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, manīṣiṇaḥ.<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 dyótamānāṃ svariyaṃ mañiṣām 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 pathíbhíś 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." <sup>11</sup>

"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*.

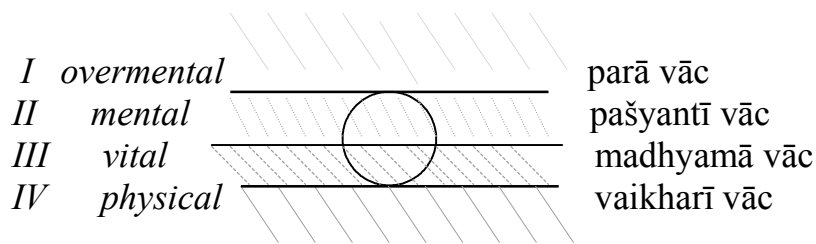
"Let us suppose a conscious use of the vibrations of sound which will produce corresponding forms or changes of form. ... Let us realise then that a vibration of sound on the material plane presupposes a corresponding vibration on the vital without which it could not have come into play; that, again, 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

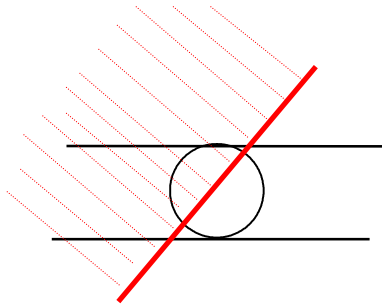
theory of creation by the Word which is the absolute expression of the Truth, and the theory of the material creation by sound-vibration in the ether correspond and are two logical poles of the same idea. They both belong to the same ancient Vedic system."<sup>20</sup>

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):

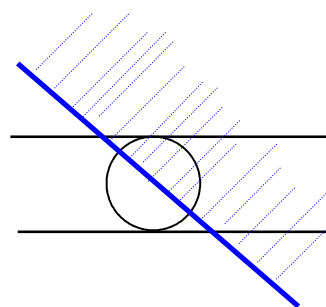


So the Creative power of the World, Cit-Shakti or Cit-Tapas, introduces the two aspects of Knowledge and Power, Name and Form, (nāma-rūpa), into manifestation, and by their interaction creates all the varieties of things:

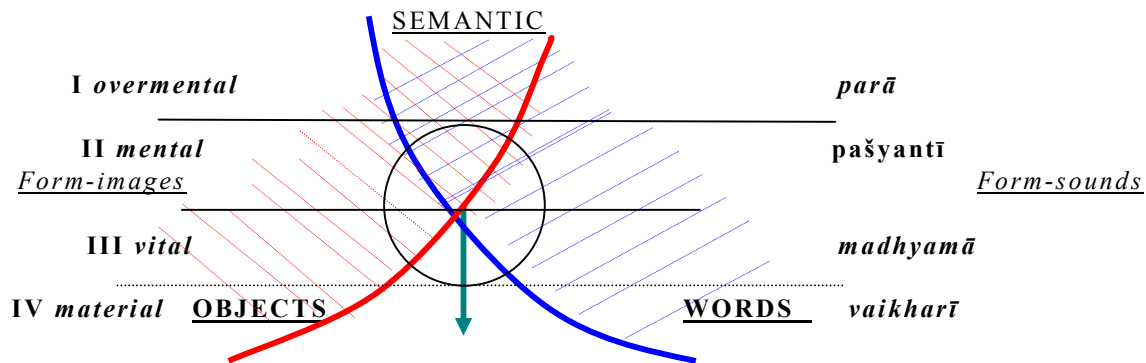
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<sup>20</sup> The Upanishads, p.126



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



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 *Svadhya*, 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 bhūtayajña; 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 mānasaśceti, 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 sarvāṅyākhyātajāni 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 (Syntactics) in the system of grammatical meanings, which we call language, 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>

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<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...."

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

<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.

its conventional significance, supported by the mind examining the syntactic structure of the word.

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) sphoṭaśabdaḥ, 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 sphoṭaśabdaḥ.

This was the beginning of the Sphoṭa 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 "single entity" is and how it works on all levels of speech. For Bhartrihari a sentence is a single undivided speech-unit and not a single word. 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 Sphoṭa.

Sphoṭa, 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 Sphoṭa in the hearer, as varṇa-sphoṭa, pada-sphoṭa and vākya-sphoṭa, 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 Sphoṭa. Sphoṭa is not a sound we hear but the sound we articulate.<sup>57</sup> According to Bhartrihari Sphoṭa operates within universal sounds whereas dhvani within a particular sound. The opposition between sphoṭa and dhvani is also presented as the opposition of class to individual. In modern terms Sphoṭa can be understood as having constant distinctive phonetic features, whereas dhvani is of a phonic nature. Sphoṭa is that which is to be manifested (vyañgya-), and the dhvani is manifesting (vyañjaka-). Sphoṭa is not uttered but it is perceived by the hearer.

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<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 Sphoṭāyana 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'.

To make the distinction clearer Bhartrihari introduces two types of dhvani: *prākṛta-dhvani*, natural sound, and *vaikṛta-dhvani*, uttered or distorted sound; where *sphoṭa* is revealed through the former one only. 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 recognition of the truth of existence through a word/text in the hearer-speaker, (*sattā*). It is of a psychological nature, as any human speech is, for the recognition of the meaning of the text is perceived in the consciousness which is beyond any analytical capacity of the external mind to distinguish among the particularities and structures, and carries within itself all the meanings; so, it requires a psychological experience. Even today this theory is widely recognised among modern linguists as the most complete investigation into the profundities of human 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 of 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 is a brief outline of some of the most essential 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 *varna-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 own 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, being a unique entity, conveys the meaning, and the division into the morphological components such as suffixes, stems etc. does not occur when the speaker or the hearer perceives it as meaningful. 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 a 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 last to be grasped 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. A sentence or a text itself is a unit of meaning. Vākya sphota however does not claim that the constituents of the sentence do not have any meaning. The main point of this theory is that the word should be always seen and understood in its context. The words have their meaning only when they form a part of a sentence.

4) *Akhaṇḍa-pada-sphota* 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-sphota* states 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 in the sentence. Bhartrihari thinks that such division of a sentence into words and stems etc., does not exist in the ordinary perception of speech. In common use of speech-production the meaning is taken as a whole, including the context. It is only when the utterance is completed that the speaker can dwell on it and analyze it in parts (as words, stems etc.), but not during the speech. And if he is able to grasp the parts of speech, such as

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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.

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.

6) Vyakti sphota and Jāti sphota

To answer the question whether Sphoṭa is particular or universal there are two different theories called 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* (stated [first by the words] and followed [then] in the sentence) 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* (following after the statement) 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).

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<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.

## The Four levels of Speech in Tantra.

Kashmirian Shaiva 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 were 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>

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,

<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

<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 vaikharī kriyā, syntactics is madhyamā jñāna, semantics is paśyantī icchā.

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

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 paśyanti and others, for without her, darkness and unconsciousness, would prevail"<sup>68</sup>: paśyantyādi daśasv api vastuto vyavasthitā tayā vinā paśyantyādiṣu aprakāṣatāpattyā jaḍatā-prasaṅgāt/

"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>

ata eva sarve pāṣāṇa-taru-tiryāṅ-manuṣya-deva-rudra-kevali-mantra-tadīṣa-tanmaheśādikā ekaiva parābhāṭṭārikā-bhūmiḥ sarva-sarvātmanaiva parameśvara-rūpeṇāste

This statement that Consciousness is pervading all the levels of creation and is expressed by all of 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 abhisamviveṣa.<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 prakāṣa and of vimarṣa (or pratyavamarṣa), that is, from its being both consciousness or light, and Word or, to say it differently, both pure, luminous (prakāṣa), 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

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

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

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

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

aware – or brings about a representation (pratyavamarša) of the cosmos.”<sup>71</sup>

### **Pašyantī Vāk**

Abhinavagupta writes in his Tantrāloka 3.236:

pašyantī hi kriyā tasyā bhāgau pūrvāparau sthitau/  
etad draṣṭavyam ity etad vimaršaḥ 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).

‘This should be seen!’ – thus the vimarša [power of parā vāk] reveals itself from its origin [in the form of pašyantī vāk].”<sup>72</sup>

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

na hi prathama-jñāna-kāle bhedo `trāsphurat  
yatra vācya-vācaka-viśeṣayor abhedaḥ /

‘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 pašyantī vāk can be described as a transition from the stage of 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 pašyantī? How is it invoked, set into motion? The explanation given by Abhinavagupta is quite interesting:

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

<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

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.

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, bodha-svabhāvā, 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 para-mahāpaśyantī, 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

<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.

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

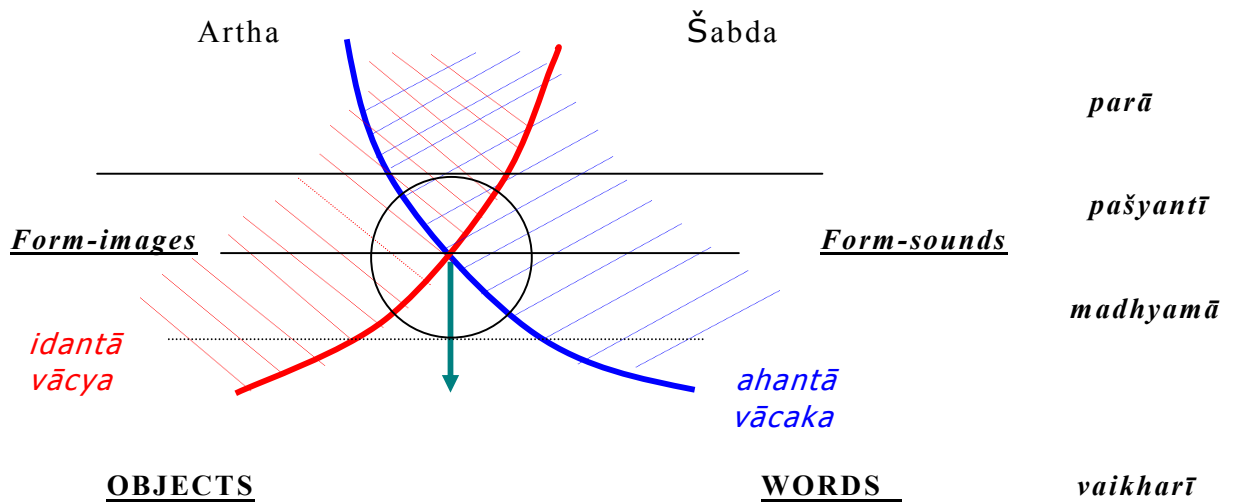
<sup>77</sup> Ibid, bubhutsā api bodhasvabhāvaiva

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

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-Non-supreme, which is the essence of *Madhyamā Vāk*.

These two elements are aiming at two different things, one is aiming at objective content, *idantā*, and the other is 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' or grammatical structure, which, according to him, is a proper subject of linguistics. The place of *madhyamā*, according to Abhinavagupta, is intellect, *buddhi*, where the 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.



<sup>79</sup> IPVV 1.5.13

## **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 paśyanti 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 is 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.

## **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 able to 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 it 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.

*There are four major streams of derivations of the word:*

- 1) *In structure: śabda brahman indivisible one existence – text – sentence – word – phoneme.*
- 2) *In meaning-power, or meaning-intention: śabda brahman, or parā vāk, indivisible one meaning –icchā śakti or intention in knowing oneself of paśyantī vāk – power to know in language as madhyamā vāk (parāparā) – and intention to know in communication by speaking it out in vaikharī vāk.*
- 3) *In the meaning-cognition: śabda brahman as self-knowing state of consciousness, or parā vāk, where prakāśa and vimarśa sides are one – the seeing speech, paśyantī vāk, were one sees the meaning to be expressed, before expression; - madhyamā vāk cognizing the meaning in the language – vaikharī vāk cognizing the meaning of speech in communication.*
- 4) *In the enjoyment of being: śabda brahman, is one being enjoying its state of being-knowing – paśyantī vāk enjoying its state of wanting-knowing – madhyamā enjoying its state of knowing-wanting – and vaikharī is enjoying of knowing-being.*

*Being-knowing – knowing oneself as such: One Being;*

*Wanting-knowing – wanting to know oneself as another being;*

*Knowing-wanting – knowing oneself as wanting to be another being;*

*Knowing-being – knowing oneself as another being.*

Before we conclude on the Tantric Vision we must briefly elaborate on the Vedic Vision of the triple worlds in the light of Sri Aurobindo.

### **The Triple Worlds of the Veda**

#### **Surya Savitri the Lord of Creation**

The Rays of the Sun thus build up the luminous planes, called in the Vedas Svar.

It has three luminous realms, called *trī rocanā*.

Which thus project the higher three realms of the Cosmic Mind, called *tisro dyāvah*, sustaining the three spaces of the Vital realms, called *trī rajāṃsi*, supported by the three foundations of the Physical, called *tisro bhūmīḥ*.<sup>80</sup>

Sri Aurobindo translated *trī rocanā* as 'three luminous worlds divine': "three powers of Light uphold three luminous worlds divine", *trī aryamā mānuṣo devātātā trī rocanā divyā dhārayanta*.<sup>81</sup> These three powers of Light as the triple status of the Supermind uphold the three luminous worlds of the Svar, *trī rocanā*, supporting then the three heavens *trīṃ uta dyūn*, and the three spaces of the mid-worlds, *trīṇi rajāṃsi*.

So the three luminous realms are projected into the three heavens of our mentality and the three spaces of our vitality; and all of them are supported by Mitra and Varuna. It is as if they penetrate it through from the beyond influencing them with their presence, consciousness and power.

RV 2. 27.8 mentions also of the three bhumis:

*tisró bhūmīr dhārayan trīm̐r utá dyūn trīṇi vratā vidáthe antár eṣām  
ṛténādityā máhi vo mahitvám̐ tád aryaman varuṇa mitra cāru*

"They (Adityas) support the three earths, and the three heavens. Three are the laws within the sacrificial gathering (inside the Antariksha). By the Truth the sons of Infinity have their greatness here great, and that is Beautiful, O Aryaman, Varuna and Mitra."

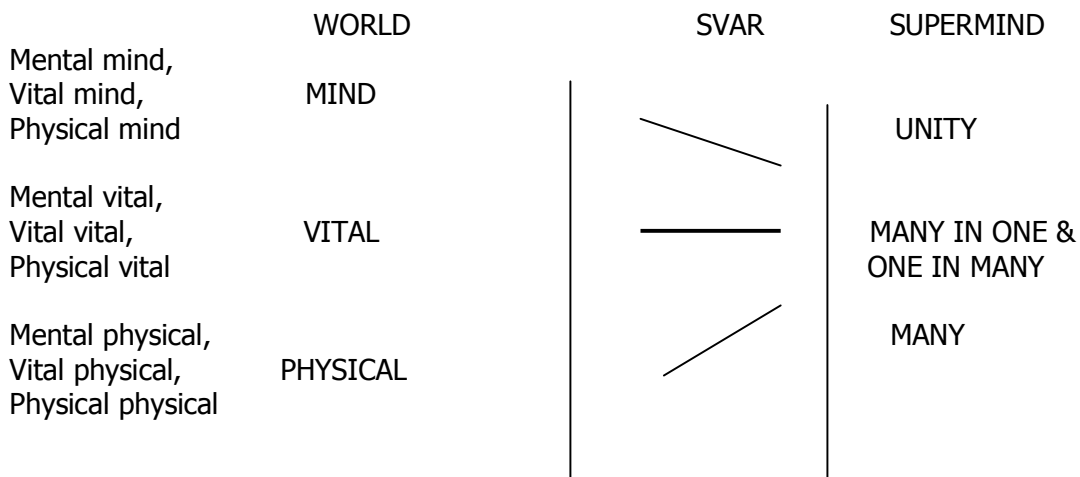
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<sup>80</sup> RV5.69.1 *trī rocanā varuṇa trīm̐r utá dyūn trīṇi mitra dhārayatho rájāṃsi* "Three worlds of the Light you two uphold, O Varuna, three heavens, three mid-worlds, O Mitra!" The three luminous worlds *trī rocanā*, (from root *ruc*, to shine) are the three levels of Svar.

<sup>81</sup> RV 5.29.1. Volume: 18-19 [SABCL] (The Life Divine), Page: 142

## The Triple Worlds

There are three earths, three levels in the vital, and the three levels in the mind: *tisro bhūmīḥ*, *trīṇi rajāṃsi*, and *tisro dyāvah*, projected, as it were, from three worlds of Svar, *trī rocanā*, as the Rays of the Sun of the Supramental Consciousness-Force.

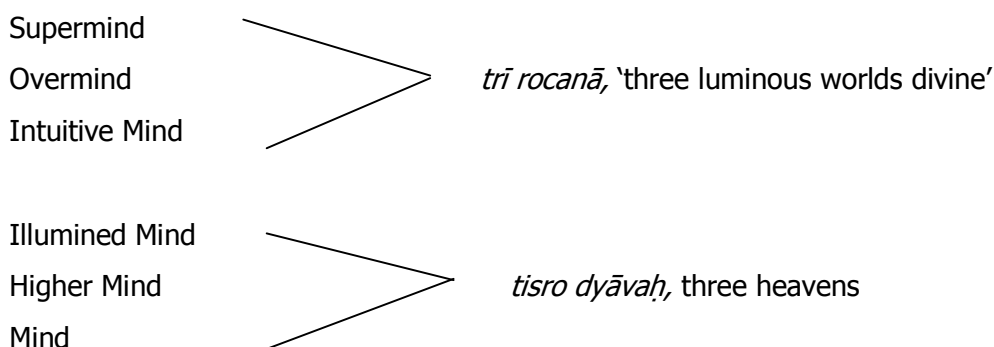


The Mental Mind is what Sri Aurobindo calls in *Savitri* the Self of Mind, the Cosmic or Universal Mind. The Vital Mind is the Universal Life's Mind and the Physical Mind is the one which manifests the physicality of the Universe. Human mind is also build on the material ground, dependent on the physical brain, dealing with physical reality of the Cosmos.

And these are the three heavens mentioned in the RV 1.35.6 as *tisro dyāvah* of Savitar: two are his own realms and one is in the realm of Yama: *tisro dyāvah savitur dvā upastāṃ ekā yamasya bhuvane virāṣāt*. So it is the Mind of the physical Universe, which is in the world of Yama, and the Universal Vital Mind and the Universal Mental Mind are in the realms of Savitar, which Sri Aurobindo calls in his system of Knowledge: Higher and Illumined Mind.

## **A Comparison of the Vedic and Sri Aurobindo's terminology**

If we were to compare Sri Aurobindo's terms with the Vedic terminology we would see this picture:



We have already mentioned *tisro dyāvah*, the three realms of the Universal Mind: Mental, Vital and Physical, which in Sri Aurobindo's terminology are identified as Illumined Mind, Higher Mind and Mind, but we did not speak about the three rocanas yet, the three luminous realms of Svar. The particularity of Svar is that it begins in the Supermind and extends itself into the Overmind and then to the Intuitive Mind. It is here that the major difficulty of understanding of Svar lies. Sri Aurobindo speaks of Svar differently in different contexts, sometimes he identifies it with the Supermind and sometimes he underlines the difference between the two. It is the world of the Rays of the Sun, which in its first stage, before going out, is still a part of the Sun and is Sun itself. It is only later that the Rays disperse into the groupings of flashes in the Overmental realms and finally become separate in the Intuitive Mind.

Sri Aurobindo describes this phenomenon in his letter (LY 261) speaking of the levels of the Overmind:

"There are different planes of the overmind.

1) One is mental, directly creative of all the formations that manifest below in the mental world—that is **the mental overmind.**

2) Above is **the overmind intuition.**

3) Still above are the planes of overmind that are more and more connected with the supermind and have a partly supramental character. Highest in the overmind ranges is the **supramental overmind or overmind gnosis.**"

Commenting on the Hymn to Mitra and Varuna, Sri Aurobindo speaks about the three rocanas as "the three luminous worlds in which the triple mental, the triple vital, the triple physical find **the light of their truth and the divine law of their powers.**"

There is another fundamental difficulty in understanding of Svar, for, according to the Veda, it was created last, after Heaven and Earth and Antariksha came into existence. It is as if it requires a feedback, or a field of application. If the lower creation were not there, Svar would not come into being. It is because of Agni being born in the lower creation, calling for the light from above, that Svar finally manifests.

Cf. RV 10.88.2: *gīrṇám bhúvanam t́amasāpagūlham/ āvíḥ śuvar abhavaj j́at́e agnaú,*  
 "[First] the World was swallowed by the Darkness and hidden within it. Then, when Agni was born, Svar became manifest."

The Hymn of Creation (RV 10.190) also speaks of Svar as being created last:

*ṛ́tam ca satyám cābhíddhāt t́apasó 'dhi ajāyata /*  
*t́ato ŕātrī ajāyata t́ataḥ samudró arṇaváh*

"The Law and the Truth were born from the kindled Power of Tapas.

From that the Night was born, from the Night - the Ocean of Inconscient Waters."

*samudrād arṇavād ádhi samvatsaró ajāyata /*  
*ahorātrāṇi vidádhad vísvasya miṣató vaśí*

"From the Ocean the Year was born, distributing Days and Nights,  
 the Master of All that changes."

*sūryācandramásau dhātā yathāpūrvám akalpayat /*  
*dívam ca pṛthivím ca antárikṣam átho śuvaḥ*

"The Sun and Moon, the Establisher fashioned as before. Heaven and Earth and Space in-between, and then - Svar!"

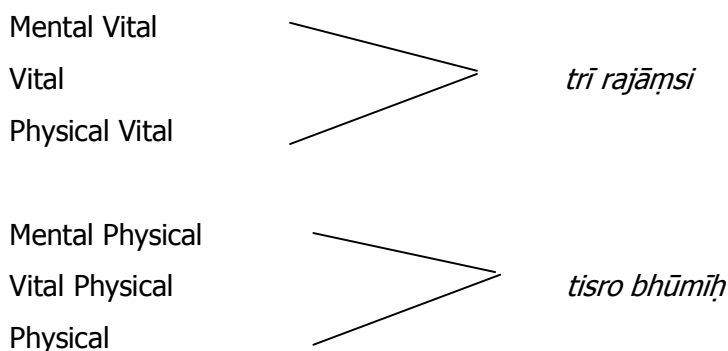
The explanation to this phenomenon we can find in the understanding of that fact that there is a fundamental difference between the Illumined Mind and the higher realms of the Intuitive Mind and the Overmind. Sri Aurobindo writes about it in his letter (LY 264):  
 "Intuition is above illumined Mind which is simply higher Mind raised to a great luminosity and more open to modified forms of intuition and inspiration. ...

The Intuition is the first plane in which there is a real opening to the full possibility of realisation—it is through it that one goes farther—first to overmind and then to supermind.”

He also defines the difference between the Illumined Mind and Intuitive Mind in his Savitri, in the Canto *The Self of Mind*, where Intuitive Mind can be reached only through the higher action of Intuition itself coming down from above to the Illumined Mind (see the quotations at the end). It is through the overflowing directness of the Overmind via Intuition that the Illumined Mind can come into contact with the Supramental consciousness says Sri Aurobindo. In his letter he writes:

“...the thousand-petalled lotus—sahasradala—above commands the higher thinking mind, houses the still higher illumined mind and at the highest opens to the intuition through which or else by an overflowing directness the overmind can have with the rest communication or an immediate contact.”<sup>82</sup>

### **Two lower triple realms of**



Tri rajamsi, the three realms of the Vital are the levels of (1) the Higher Universal Life, (2) the Universal Life, as such, with an entrance to the Infinite Darkness, and (3) the Universal Life as it is known to us projected into the creation of material Universe.

So, the Mental Vital corresponds to the plane which Sri Aurobindo describes in the Second Book of the Traveler of the Worlds, in the Ninth Canto *The Paradise of the Life-Gods*. It is the Life Force which is on the other shore of Creation, beyond the darkness.

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<sup>82</sup> LY 365

To reach to that shore Aswapati must cross the regions of the Eternal Night, which are described in the previous two Cantos, 7 and 8: *The Descent into Night*, and *The World of Falsehood, The Mother of Evil and the Sons of Darkness*.

It is only after crossing those levels of Infinite Darkness and Evil that he moves to the realms of the Mental Vital and then to the Mind levels in the following Cantos; first to *The Kingdoms and Godheads of the Little Mind*, which corresponds to the Cosmic Physical Mind, depicted in the Veda as Heaven of Yama, ruling over men, *yamasya bhuvane virāṣāt*, which is our human mind in its highest potential, and then to the Kingdoms and Godheads of the Greater Mind, to the Cosmic Higher Mind's regions.

Thus the realms of Life are the place where all the troubles, the dark forces enter into our system of mental-physical existence. It is here in the Vital, *Antarikṣa*, that the bridge is to be made by the Sacrifice to the higher powers of consciousness seeking their direct and effective influence. It is here that the whole battle is going on between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness in the field of our Life.

The *tisro bhūmīḥ* are the three realms of the Universal Physical, determined by

- (1) the Mind, which makes it self conscious in manifesting and maintaining its form,
- (2) by the Life, which makes it dynamic in its own movement;
- (3) and with the proper Physical, as an faculty housing all other forces and levels of consciousness taking their part in the material manifestation of the Divine.

Without physical being fully prepared there can't be any direct Supramental influence in the material Nature, for it is, as it is clear now, dragging down the vital and the mind inherent in it, not allowing them to realize their full and free potential. And there is a reason for it, for all of them are here only to manifest the Divine in matter, and not for any other reason. Sri Aurobindo says in his letter to a Sadhak:<sup>83</sup>

"There can be no conquest of the other planes by the supermind but only an influence, so long as the physical is not ready. ... And how is it possible to perfect the mind and vital unless the physical is prepared—for **there is such a thing as the mental and vital physical and mind and vital cannot be said to be perfectly prepared until these are ready.**"

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<sup>83</sup> LY 1228

### **Body as a Supramental creation**

The triple conception by the Creator, depicted in the Veda, within his own Consciousness creates or is the Supermind. The very physical consciousness is a result of this conception and a part of its realisation.

The physical and mental consciousness are seen in the Veda as two luminous firmaments, *rodasī*, supporting the growing Soul in this Creation.

The body itself is seen as the outcome of a Supramental Creation, which at the first glance is not easy to understand, but which explains why in the post Vedic spiritual traditions together with disappearance of the Svar and the Supermind the body also lost its priority and got reduced to be seen as an imprisonment and even as a problem in finding our true self rather than a solution in manifesting the Divine in matter.

Sri Aurobindo writes in his letter: **"The supramental is necessary for the transformation of terrestrial life and being, not for reaching the Self. One must realise Self first, only afterwards can one realise the supermind."**

In the Vedas the Heaven and Earth, our mental and physical consciousness were considered to be pure and conscious of the Divine. The body was seen as a fortress and refuge for the soul of man against the forces of Darkness. It was referred to as 'well-made', a dwelling place of the Spirit. The treatment of the physical body underwent a fundamental change in the later Mayavada-oriented spiritual traditions, it was seen as an obstacle and hindrance on the path to the spiritual realisation rather than the supporter or the field of realisation. It fell off into the domain of a lower consciousness and was blamed for keeping soul here bound to suffering against its will to be free.

### **The Seven Suns of the Supermind**

Sri Aurobindo reconsidered the usual Yogic practices, oriented towards Liberation alone, which came in the post Vedic period, when the transformation of earthly life and physical body was considered already to be impossible, and turned towards the Vedic view of transformative practice: invoking the higher powers by the means of aspiration



in the heart and surrendering to them for the transformation. He introduces the ancient Vedic methods of a Descent of a Higher Consciousness and Power into our mental, vital and even subtle physical and physical bodies for transformation.

It is as if he is looking from above at the physical body, seeing it from the Supramental point of view. He writes about the seven centers in the body as the manifestation of the Seven Suns of the Supermind in this way:

1. The Sun of Supramental Truth, - Knowledge=Power originating the supramental creation. Descent into the Sahasradala.
2. The Sun of Supramental Light and Will-Power, transmitting the Knowledge-Power as dynamic vision and command to create, found and organize the supramental creation. Descent into Ajna Chakra, the center between the eyes.
3. The Sun of Supramental Word, embodying the Knowledge-Power, empowered to express and arrange the supramental creation. Descent into the Throat Centre.
4. The Sun of Supramental Love, Beauty, and Bliss, releasing the Soul of the Knowledge-Power to vivify and harmonise the supramental creation. Descent into the Heart-Lotus.
5. The Sun of Supramental Force dynamised as a power and source of life to support the supramental creation. Descent into Navel Centre.
6. The Sun of Life-Radiances (Power-Rays) distributing the dynamism and pouring it into concrete formations. Descent into the Penultimate Centre.
7. The Sun of Supramental Substance-Energy and Form-Energy empowered to embody the supramental life and stabilize the creation. Descent into the Muladhara.

*Some Important observations:*

## **Paśyantī Vāk:**

- 1) **Meaning of meaning,**  
(parā vāk expressed as paśyantī vāk, the Intention, icchā)
- 2) **Meaning of structure,**  
(paśyantī, the Intention, projects itself within madhyamā vāk, structure of language)
- 3) **Meaning of expression,**  
(paśyantī, the Intention, projects itself within vaikharī vāk, speech).

## **Madhyamā Vāk:**

- 4) **Structure of meaning,**  
vākya sphoṭa, (disclosure of Intention in the text, of paśyantī, Idea)
- 5) **Structure of structure,**  
pada sphoṭa, (disclosure of Intention through the structure of language, of in-between words, of paśyantī, which is of nature of language, thought)
- 6) **Structure of expression,**  
varna sphoṭa. (disclosure of Intention in sound, in-between phonemes, of paśyantī, which is of nature of speech)

## **Vaikharī Vāk:**

- 7) **Expression of meaning,**  
(vaikharī expresses the Intention of paśyantī in a meaningful way, selecting sound-expression suiting for it)
- 8) **Expression of structure,**  
(vaikharī expresses madhyamā as prākṛta dhvani, articulated sound)
- 9) **Expression of expression,**  
(vaikharī expresses itself as vaikṛta dhvani, natural sound).

It is this 'expression of meaning' (7) through sound which was denied by Patanjali and all the following linguists and finally by Saussure, defining the phoneme as having differentiating significance but not meaning in itself (see the chapter on Patanjali). Differentiating significance is an articulated sound in the mind, prākṛta dhvani, is in our scheme an 'expression of structure of sound' (8), and sound as such is the 'expression of expression of sound' (9). It is because of paśyantī being

present in the 'expression of meaning' (7), the unifying presence of parā vāk that the sound is beyond any articulatory definitions, it is not a phoneme yet, but a meaningful phonic representation of parā vāk. It is this part which was lost in the Western languages and was preserved in India in Sanskrit as system of etymons. The very oneness of the system, or better to say, a regular character of the system of simple root sounds, points us to the meaningful sound as such prior to the mental articulation or creation of phoneme, to the speech of Brihaspati, parā vāk. The very substance of Vaikharī is a substance of that Parā Vāk, which comes down in the form of Intention of paśyanti to articulate the meaning within its own sound-field, which later will be articulated as phoneme, prākṛta dhvani. This distinction between the three types of vaikharī is crucial for us to discover the meaningful part of the prākṛta dhvani, of that very signifier which was left without meaning for so long in all linguistic traditions.

The term 'parā vāk' was not introduced by Bhartrihari, but was introduced later in Tantras of Kashmirian Shaivism. The Para Vak is always implied, according to Abhinavagupta, on all the levels of speech. It is a transcendental Word which by its very projection into manifestation creates the flash of a seeing speech, paśyantī vāk. And since the parā vāk pervades all the levels of speech from the highest to the lowest it makes it coherent within all other possible texts already existing, which are the expressions of the same parā vāk. The meaning is coherent throughout the space and time.

In this scheme we can clearly see how certain realities of the Word correspond with each other, and how the parā vāk represents itself in manifestation.

The meaning is not a property of the mind but of the transcendental Consciousness, Cit, which is thus represented on all the levels of the Word, including all of them: the mental formation of its intention and vital formulation of its language and the expression of its sound in speech.

So meaning is present on all the levels of speech, language and intention, representing three major functions of language: communicative, cognitive and volitional (or creative), kriyā, jñāna, icchā. Though the creative aspect we can address to the Parā Vāk itself. So these three are clearly corresponding with semiotics division on pragmatics, syntactics and semantics, for meaning is present on all the levels of expression, cognition and volition.

Now if meaning is present on all the levels, then what would be the meaning of expression? According to pragmatics it will indicate something without the text. But indication is like a pointing finger. Does pointing finger itself have any meaning? Or it is only bound to some other

meaning? If it is so how come that it at all could come into being of meaningful relations without any meaningful correspondence to reality other than that of the other? It has only a differentiating significance, as it was already declared by the linguists of all times from Patanjali to Saussure. But that corresponds in this scheme to the "expression of/by/within structure", *prākṛta dhvani*, articulated sound, which is of the nature of syntactics of expression, as it were, but what about meaning of expression, the meaning of the sound?

The meaningful expression of the speech, or sound, is not easy to imagine for our over-structured mind. How can sound be meaningful in its expression of the Meaning-Intention other than through the structure of language? Does it mean that the sound per se has a meaning? And if suppose we hypothetically accept that the sound has a meaning what would it be? Is there any evidence of such sound and usage of it in a meaningful way?

But before we come to speak about the meaningful sound, we should have a glimpse into the meaning itself. What is meaning? If three levels of *Vak* represent three different functions of consciousness: *icchā*, Intention, Will, *jñāna*, Cognition, and *kriyā*, Action of the *paśyantī*, *madhyamā*, and *vaikharī* respectively, what is then *artha*, meaning?

The meaning is expressed through all the means of Intention, Cognition and Action or Expression of Consciousness.

The first verses of the *Vakyapadiya* indicate the ontological mystery of meaning:

*Anādi-nidhanam bhārma śabdatattvam yad akṣaram/  
vivartate arthabhāvena prakriyā jagato yataḥ/*

"Brahman is without beginning or end. It is the essence of sound (*śabda*), the imperishable syllable, reveals itself by the becoming of its meanings *artha-bhāvena*, from which the action of moving forward (in time and space) of the world [comes into being]."

It is interesting to note here that the word *artha-* has two major meanings: 'a meaning' and 'a thing'. It is to say that meaning is not only intentional, or structural and expressive, it is in itself a substantial being.<sup>84</sup>

*Artha* is defined in *Vakyapadiya* (VP after) as a "sense of a word; the object shown by a word."<sup>85</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Giving a name, *nāmadheya*, in mystic thought is giving a being. The word is the very being of what is named, it is immortal, RV 10.139.6 etc.

<sup>85</sup> "This sense of a word is described as having 18 kinds", (VP 2.79), p.373 of *Vākyapadiya* of Bharṭṛhai, edited by K.V. Abhyankar, V.P.Limayer, Poona 1965.

Now if artha is that by becoming of which the supreme Brahman reveals itself in the manifestation of the world then the three levels of the Word are its means by which it does it. The complexity of meaning is indicated in the very nature of parā vāk, which is present on all the levels of the Word.

*kavir māniṣī paribhuḥ svayambhūr yāthatathyataḥ arthān vyadadhāt  
śāśvatībhyaḥ samābhyaḥ*

“The Poet, the Intelligent, the All-existent and Self-existent one, distributed all over the meanings, *arthān*, according to their nature for all times.”<sup>86</sup>

The meaning can be gathered then from the means of its distribution: Intention, Cognition, Action. In other words it should be cognizable in its intention and action; and it should be intentional in its cognition and action/expression, and even it should be expressible /actionable in its intention and cognition. In other words, using Vedic language, the union of Heaven and Earth, Meaning and Sound is to take place through the structure of language. The creation of language was thus seen as the act of creation itself and Indra in the Vedic mythology as a creator, who separated heaven and earth, he is also considered as a first grammarian in Indian tradition, the Lord of the Divine Mind.

In the myth of creation narrated in Mahabhashya of Patanjali, it is Indra who was the first student of Brihaspati, the teacher of the Word. He was learning Sanskrit from him. But when he realized that it would take too long, for the meaning-sound of Brihaspati is infinite, always actual to the time and space of its meaning, intrinsically true, as it were, when he understood that he will never be able to finish his studies, then he stopped the flow of the meaningful sound of Brihaspati’s speech, cut it into pieces, grams, and created grammar. He filled the grammatical, mental categories of time and space and causality with the sound of Brihaspati. Now one could apply the word into whatever context, regardless whether the meaning is suiting to the environment or not. This misplacement of the word from its own meaning is seen as the act of creation which created time and space. Now the word can be understood only through the arrangements of the mental structure of language (*vākya-sphoṭa*). Without knowing the language one cannot understand the meaning of the word and the text.<sup>87</sup> The structure of the mind imposes its own semantic of structure, which in itself becomes the

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<sup>86</sup> ĪśaUp 9.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. VP 1.13: ‘tattvabodhaḥ śabdānām na ’sti vyākaraṇād ṛte .. “But we don’t clearly recognize the truth of words, without grammar.”

object of linguistic studies, devoid of meaning and sound (according to Saussure).

This cognizable part of language-structure was defined by Saussure as the very material of General Linguistics. The intention-meaning and the sound-production as such were excluded from the studies, in other words meaning and sound were excluded from the science of language, and it became meaningless and soundless.

Fortunately enough it did not happen in India, and the science of language was developed to the heights which are still waiting to be seen and recognized by the Western linguistics. The theory of Sphota of Bhartrihari and the concept of Vak in the Tantras are those profound texts which can shed some light on the studies of language of the future science of language.

S.D.Joshi in his article "Distinctive and Significant Levels of Language" says: "The scholars of the west are working on the same problems but most of them are ignorant of the achievements of the ancient Indian philosophers in this field. I hope that, perhaps, by the acquaintance with the new thoughts in modern linguistics, semantics and philosophy, one may point out the relevancy of ancient Indian linguistic thought to the modern one, although the former has been developed in different environment and written from different angles of vision."<sup>88</sup>

Sanskrit language is in itself a field of such studies. The scientific way of dealing with a subject today (not only in the field of linguistics) is to approach it in the most objective way, as something purely independent, existing by itself and as it is. But "*... the true method of Science – says Sri Aurobindo, - is to go back to the origins, the embryology, the elements and more obscure processes of things. From the obvious only the obvious and superficial results. The profundities of things, their real truth, can best be discovered by penetration into the hidden things that the surface of phenomena conceals, into that past development of which the finished forms present only secret and dispersed indications or into the possibilities from which the actualities we see are only a narrow selection. A similar method applied to the earlier forms of human speech can alone give us a real Science of Language.*"

*"Law and process must have governed the origins and developments of language. Given the necessary clue and sufficient data, they must be discoverable. It seems to me that in the Sanskrit language the clue can be found, the data lie ready for investigation."*<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> P.91 The Sphotanirnaya of kaunda Bhatta, edited by S.D.Joshi, University of Poona, 1967.

<sup>89</sup> The Secret of the Veda, p.47

Sri Aurobindo gives us a key to studying language from a different point of view. He started it in his work "The Origins of Aryan Speech". Although he did not complete it, he has given us the principles and direction for farther studies:

*"... we can find an equal regularity, an equal reign of fixed process on the psychological side, in the determining of the relation of particular sense to particular sound."*

Such a program of research is of the highest possible aim: to recover and recreate the meaning of the word in its highest sense as śabda brahman of Vakyapadiya, or parā vāk of the Tantra.