

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.¹ Abhinavagupta following Bhartrihari and his own Tantric tradition defines the four levels of speech in his Tantrāloka in this way:² "When she (parā vāk) is differentiating then she is known in three terms as paśyantī, madhyamā, and vaikharī."³

According to Abhinavagupta the differentiation on the phonemes, words and sentences is inherent in the paśyantī vāk.⁴

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 Spandakārikāḥ⁵

Vaikharikā nāma kriyā jñānamayī bhavati madhyamā vāk/
Icchā punaḥ paśyantī sūkṣmā sarvāsāṃ samarasā vṛttiḥ//⁶

"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.⁷ It is thus identical with pure consciousness, Cit, which

¹ 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 19th 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.

² 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.

³ TA 3,236, and comm. vol. 2, pp 225-226

⁴ 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.

⁵ SpK 4.18 (pp.149-151)

⁶ It resembles the semantic levels in semiotics: pragmatics is vaikharī kriyā, syntactics is madhyamā jñāna, semantics is paśyantī icchā.

⁷ PTV, p.13 satatodita, 'ever-active', 'eternally present',

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.⁸

He also says that parā vāk "is indeed present on all the levels of paśyantī and others, for without her, darkness and unconsciousness, would prevail"⁹: paśyantyādi daśasv api vastuto vyavasthitā tayā vinā paśyantyādiṣu aprakāśatāpattyā jaḍaṭā-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."¹⁰

ata eva sarve pāśāṇa-taru-tiryāṅ-manuṣya-deva-rudra-kevali-mantra-tadiśa-tanmaheśādikā ekaiva parābhaṭṭārikā-bhūmiḥ sarva-sarvātmanaiva parameśvara-rūpeṇāste

This statement that Consciousness is pervading all the levels of creation and is expressed by all them is fundamental for Indian approach to language. And if this higher Consciousness would not be present within the creation, all would fall back into Inconscient. This view is clearly Vedic. The creation was conceived, according to the Veda, in two stages. First, out of himself the Supreme created all the worlds and then he entered them, ātmanātmānam abhisamviveśa.¹¹ So if he would withdraw his Consciousness, the luminous Word, the creation would again fall into the darkness.

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

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

⁸ Cp. to Atharva Veda 1.1.1-4.

⁹ PTV, p.5

¹⁰ PTV, p. 188

¹¹ TaiAr, 23., Tait Up 2.6 etc. etc.

aware – or brings about a representation (pratyavamarśa) of the cosmos.”¹²

Paśyantī Vāk

Abhinavagupta writes in his Tantrāloka 3.236:

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

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

‘This should be seen!’ – thus the vimarśa [power of parā vāk] reveals itself from its origin [in the form of paśyantī vāk].”¹³

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

na hi 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.’¹⁴

So paśyantī 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 paśyantī? How is it invoked, set into motion? The explanation given by Abhinavagupta is quite interesting:

¹² Andre Padoux, Vāc, p. 177-178.

¹³ Cp. “The Supreme”, - says the Mother, - “decided to exteriorise herself, objectivise herself, 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

¹⁴ PTV pp 4-5

tatas tu paśyantī yad yad abhīpsitam tat tad eva samucita-karaṇa-niyama-prabodhitam bodha-sūtraṇa-mātreṇa vimṛṣati/¹⁵

'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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ In fact the will to be aware, bubhutsā, in its nature is awareness itself, bodha-svabhāvā, says Abhinavagupta.¹⁸

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.¹⁹ Moreover all the greater mahāpaśyantīs can finally be seen as those included into the supreme paramahāpaśyantī, which is parā vāk herself.

Madhyamā Vāk

Madhyamā, literary means 'mediating', which mediates between the undifferentiated and the differentiated levels of the word. It is still a projection of the parā vāk together with paśyantī, only on this level the language finally appears as the division on phonemes, words and sentences. If on the level of paśyantī it was still involved, enclosed, as it were, samvartita-, then on the level of madhyamā it is unfolded into the mental distinct categories of language: grammar. It is on this level only

¹⁵ ibid

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ IPVV, 1.5.13: yad icchā-śaktir jñāna-kriyāśaktyor anugrahikā

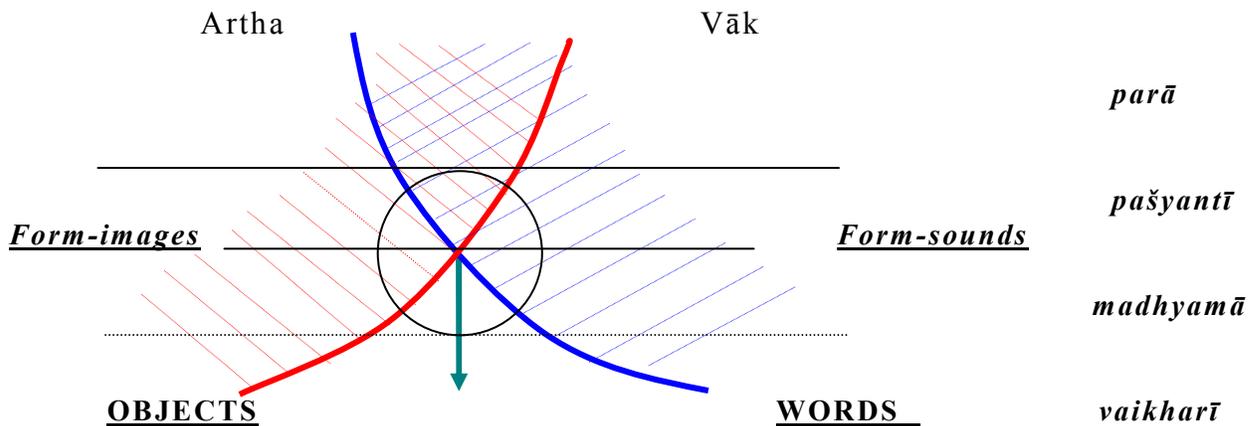
¹⁸ Ibid, bubhutsā api bodhasvabhāvaiva

¹⁹ IPVV 1.5.13: 'evam grāmaṃ gacchāmīti mahāpaśyantī, gṛhān nihsarāmīti paśyantīm apeksya 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*,²⁰ 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.



²⁰ 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 in derivation 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 to know – knowing oneself as such: One Being;

Wanting to know – wanting to know oneself as another being;

Knowing to want – knowing oneself as wanting to be another being;

Knowing to be – knowing oneself as another being.

Samjñāna, Ājñāna, Vijñāna, Prajñāna.

Samjñāna, 'being to know', knowing oneself as such, taking otherness into oneself and knowing oneself as such: universal sense.

Ājñāna, 'willing to know', dwelling on the image of things with power, interfering with one's own will to identify with the image of

things; imposing one's own power over it in order to identify with it: to know it as oneself.

Vijñāna, 'knowing to will', to want; knowing oneself as wanting or willing to be another being. This 'knowledge to will to be' or to become another being is the most comprehensive approach to the multitudinous existence.

Prajñāna, 'knowing to be', or knowing as the manifested being, as another; knowing oneself objectively, through analytic and synthetic cognition.