

THE CENTRAL PROBLEMS OF BHARTṚHARI'S PHILOSOPHY

Authored by Devendra Nath Tiwari, Published(2008) by ICPR, New Delhi

About the book

It is a cognitive approach to Bhartṛhari's(5th Century) Philosophy of sentence holism (Vākyapadīya).The book for the first time presents his philosophy authentically as a system of philosophy of language and analysis. It discusses the metaphysical, phonetic, linguistic and cognitive understanding of language and analyses in depth the word-theoris's arguments and their reply from the side of Bhartṛhari. It brings out his a philosophical perspective of his sentence holism based on the active theory of cognition by language for which reading, writing, analyzing, translating are cognitive activities.

While discussing the issues undertaken, the views of Indian philosophical schools and contemporary Western philosophers popular in our time have been analysed in view of a comparison to sententialistic holistic understanding on them. It is based on first hand original text and commentaries and thus it's authenticity cannot be questioned.

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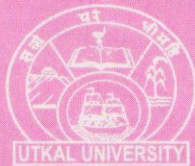
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Book Reviews

Devendra Nath Tiwari : *The Central Problems of Bhartrhari's Philosophy*, Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi, 2008, pp.434, Price Rs. 530.

Students of Indian Philosophy have long been accustomed to the study of Vedanta –especially Advaita Vedanta –so much so that they are found to ignore the fact that there are so many metaphysical thinkers other than Sankara and Ramanuja and thinkers like Dignaga, Sriharsa and Jairasi who refute almost all forms of arguments given in favor of metaphysical and epistemological assumptions. Bhartrhari is one such philosopher with reflective work of great depth to his credit, who analyses and interprets cognition as revealed in the mind by language but unfortunately ignored by students of Indian philosophy. There are of course translations, explanations and elucidatory works on this great thinker, as for example, the work of K.A.S.Ayer, K. Raghavan Pillai, Johannes Bronkhorst and a few others. There is also a recent edition by B.P. Tripathi published from Varanaseya Sanskrit University, Varanasi, with a recent commentary namely *Ambakartri'* by Raghunath Sharma. The author of the book under review here seems to depend mostly on this edition.

The work by D.N.Tiwari, being reviewed here, deals not only with philosophy of Bhartrhari as suggested by the title of the book but also with the Indian Philosophy of Grammar with references to Patanjali's famous *Mahābhāṣya*. Works on this field have already appeared by Gaurinath Shastri, C. Kunjhuni Raja, B. K. Matilal and others. Commentaries on *Vākyapadīya* by Bhartrhari and Harivrsabha on first part called 'Brahma-kānda', by Punyarāja on second part called

'Vākya-kānda and by Helarāja on third part called Prakirṇa-kānda have also been published. The author of the volume under review has, it is evident, studied all these works painstakingly and has reinterpreted them in a work, the extent of which is very wide. I am quite impressed by D.N. Tiwari's outstanding scholarship.

The detailed references to Patanjali's well known *Mahābhāṣya* is necessary and unavoidable in the light of Bhartr̥hari's own, *Mahābhāṣya-dīpikā*'. D.N.Tiwari has also referred to Panini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and works of some Vaisesikas, Naiyayikas and Mimansakas.

The works on Bhartr̥hari's *Vākya-padīya* have been restricted to those by Sanskritists and D.N.Tiwari is the first academic philosopher to undertake a philosophical interpretation and is pioneering in this respect. There was also an international seminar on Bhartr̥hari held at Pune in 1992 (which Tiwari does not seem to have attended but is mentioned by him in preface to his volume) and the proceedings of this important seminar have been edited by Saroja Bhante and Johannes Bronkhorst and published in 1994. Most contributors to this volume are Sanskrit scholars and no Indian philosopher of note seems to have been interested in this seminar. It is a matter of great regret that students of Indian philosophy have shown very little interest in the works of Bhartr̥hari, who is known to most of them only as the author of *Nitisataka*. Thus D.N.Tiwari's work fills a wide gap in the study of the history of Indian philosophy. Historians of Indian philosophy like S.Radhakrishnan have totally ignored Bhartr̥hari. I notice, however, that Tiwari does not make a departure from tradition and does refer to Advaita Vedanta at many places.

II

D.N.Tiwari regards Bhartr̥hari's approach as holistic. The very first chapter of this book entitled 'Philosophical Problems of Vākya-padīya' describes and elaborates his position that Bhartr̥hari's work is distinctly

marked as interpretation of cognition revealed in the mind. Bhartṛhari's elucidation of the *pada* (word), *padārtha* (word-meaning), *vākya* (sentence), *vākyaārtha* (sentential-meaning) and *vyavahāra* (communication) takes language as a whole identifying it with reality independently of any ontology.

The relation between language, thought and reality is appropriately the focus of attention in the *Vākyapadīya* and quite lucidly dealt with by D.N.Tiwari. Thought in fact is indiscernible from language. This has been the point of controversy in western thoughts also. Tiwari in fact has criticized (and justifiably too) that western philosophers of language regard language as the mere tool for thinking. One has to distinguish between cognition on the one hand and thought on the other, which is communicated by articulations. The author of the book under review discusses in pointed details with adequate justification and I agree with his defense of Bhartṛhari and his critique of some contemporary western philosophers like Wittgenstein, Frege, and W.V. Quine. Critique of ontology is of course different from Bhartṛhari's understanding of language as constituting the very structure of reality.

Bhartṛhari is a philosopher who accepts non-difference of language and meaning (*yo'yam sabdah so'yam arthaḥ*). The relation which in Bhartṛhari is *yogyatā* is not empirical relationship between the word and meaning. The relation is discussed by Bhartṛhari in *Sambandhasamuddeśaḥ* of the third part of *Vākyapadīya*: '*sambandhaśabde sambandho yogyatām prati yogyatā* (verse -31)'; rendering that relation by the word '*sambandha*' is the natural fitness of the word. In my view the criticism of Bhartṛhari of other schools is inadequate and his own definition of *sambandha* is too general. D.N. Tiwari has discussed the issue and has tried to justify Bhartṛhari's position with his study of Prakāśa's commentary of Helarāja on *Prakirṇakānda*.

Analysis of cognition as expressed in the mind by language (*Sphoṭa*) is the analysis of language, because the two being intertwined

is the principal problem in *Vākyapadīya* and D.N. Tiwari is quite correct in discussing the point holistically.

Bhartr̥hari's own appraisal is holistic in so far as it unites cognition, being as expressed in the mind and the language that expresses. The most important thing in Bhartr̥hari's work is that what (ideas) figured in the mind are also being – secondary being with contrast to the primary in the external world and the beings revealed in the mind are only known and that is known only by language. *Sphoṭa* is the flash, the intelligible being of language and the same is meaning (*pratibhā*) and what is beyond *Sphoṭa* cannot be known as a flash (*pratibhā*). In Bhartr̥hari's holism, the flash comprises of the objects of cognition that is the language and meaning as awareness. Patanjali also has indicated this point as he says that language is the only guide to cognition and communication and that ontological reference is made by implication as the ontic substratum of the flashes in the mind or otherwise irrelevant for the vaiyākaraṇa's position. Tiwari has explored this issue, has presented Bhartr̥hari's philosophy of language and has given an exposition that there is possibility of philosophical reflection without any infatuation to ontic commitment. Though there are detailed references to Patanjali's *Mahābhāṣya* and Bhartr̥hari's *Vākyapadīya*, we can not categorize this work as a comparative study because Patanjali's work is taken up and discussed in detail by the author before he takes up Bhartr̥hari's *Vākyapadīya* also for a detailed analysis and illustration. The method avoids the pitfalls of the sort of comparative philosophy as is done by the adherents of Advaita Vedanta. The common elements in both of the texts are brought out by the author.

Students of Indian philosophy should realize that there are philosophically very profound views expressed in Sanskrit other than the vedantic texts. For example, Advaita Vedanta does not go beyond the *prasthānatrayī* and develops a philosophy as expressed by the three basic texts, whereas Bhartr̥hari is referable to tradition much wider in scope above all the appeals also to human knowledge and communication in language.

The one defect I found in the book is English expression at some places. The main reason for this difficulty of interpreting philosophy of language and grammar in Sanskrit is the insufficiency of English language which can not transcribe all the ideas and concepts found in Sanskrit texts.

The book under review is quite original in the sense that for the first time the author deals with and investigates cognitive holistic understanding of language on the basis of his interpretation of *Vākyapadīya* and its commentaries by Bhartṛhari himself on *Brahmakānda*, Punyarāja on *Vākyakānda* and Helarāja on *Prakirnakānda*. I congratulate D.N.Tiwari on this profound interpretation of philosophy of language. I believe this work will be read by all serious students of philosophy.

N.S.S. RAMAN

Former Professor and Head,
Department of Philosophy & Religion,
Former Dean, Faculty of Arts,
Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi-221005.

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BOOK REVIEWS

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The Central Problems of
Bhartrhari's Philosophy

Amma and Other Stories

Report on Autumn School



Vol. XIV Nos. 1-2, 2008

D. N. Tewari, *The Central Problems of Bhartrhari's Philosophy*, New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 2008. Rs.530

Studies on Indian view of Grammar have been by and large hitherto confined to Samskritists. Writings by mainstream philosophers on Patanjali and Bhartrhari's view of language and grammar are sparse specially in comparison with the amount of work available on traditionally accepted nine schools of Indian philosophy. Prof. Devender Nath Tiwari's 'The Central Problems of Bhartrhari's Philosophy' is a much needed work to fill up this lacuna. Prof. Tiwari has divided the book into a total of nine chapters starting with laying down a document map of the central problems raised in Bhartrhari's Vkyapadia in Chapter-I and concluding with a sixteen pages chapter on a critical estimate of these different problems in context.

Chapter-I of the book titled "Philosophical Problems of Vākyapadīya" opens with a general note on the importance that has been attributed to sravana tradition which Prof. Tiwari defines as "the proper learning of the knowledge of the sacred text" [p-1]. Since the study of the sacred texts is held to be essential by all the six orthodox schools of Indian philosophy, a proper study of how language functions and yields meaning to us from the text becomes an important issue of consideration. Stating the central thesis of Vākyapadīya, Prof. Tiwari writes, "Bhartrhari's aim in his philosophy of Vākyapadīya is distinctly marked as the interpretation of cognition as revealed in the mind by language in usual

communication (vyavahāra) for clarity and conception that provides bliss." [p-1] Following this he gives an account of number of philosophical problems ranging from issues related to psychology to some basic principles of science that can be traced in Vākyapadīya in explicit or implicit way.

Chapter-II of the book is titled "Concept of Speech Element". Interestingly what Bhartrhari would consider of secondary importance for his scheme of metaphysics is taken up first of all by the author. Though it is not explicitly stated in the book I think the idea behind this approach is that speech is the most concrete and palpable element in language therefore though the original chronology in a speech act in real space and time is unitary and impartite thought, in-depth grammar or syntax and utterance, for the purpose of understanding of the empirical basis of linguistic understanding, it is better to consider utterance first and grammar and thought later on. This is the chronology Prof. Tiwari follows in this book which should facilitate reader's understanding. Chapter-II contains a very comprehensive account of different levels of speech as propounded by Bhartrhari and his theory of sphotv da. In the later half of the chapter Prof. Tiwari presents a very interesting account of polemic between Bhartrhari and Jayanta and Mīmāṃsakas.

Unlike in the west, Indian philosophy of language has an elaborate discussion on how words attribute their meaning in a sentence and whether they have any reality of their own apart from their use in a sentence. Bhartrhari has a unique stand on this issue where he denies the reality of words altogether and maintains the sentence to be the smallest meaning bearing unit in language. Prof. Tiwari discusses these issues at length in Chapter-III titled "The Concept of Sentence." First half of the chapter gives an exposition of Padavādin's (word holists) and Akhandavādin's (sentence holists) positions and the later half presents an exhaustive account of the polemic between the two.

Taking the same discussion to a new level Prof. Tiwari gives an in-depth study of metaphysics behind the position of sentence-holists and word-holists, in Chapter-IV of the book which is titled "The Concept of Sentential Meaning." This chapter opens with an account of the Bhartrhari's arguments against Mimāṃs and Nyāya positions. The latter half of the chapter focuses on some of the metaphysical issues involved in analysis of linguistic understanding. Prof. Tiwari's exposition of the notion of Pratibh and Svabhāva as propounded by Bhartrhari and its juxtaposition with Mimāṃsakas notion of bhāvan is rich on clarity and lucidity. But the reader is left a bit wondering at the end of the chapter as

to why some portion at the beginning of this chapter should not have been a part of the previous chapter owing to the continuity of the theme.

Keeping with the reverse chronology followed through out the book, Chapter-V of the book titled "The Concept of Word (Pada)" makes a transition from sentential meaning to the concept of words. The main problematic taken up in this chapter is whether words can be recognized as independent meaning bearing units in language given the fact that it is only a sentence which yields to us a workable, useful and practical piece of information or understanding. Prof. Tiwari not only gives an exhaustive survey of different theories on this issue but also compares and contrasts them with their western counterparts wherever possible.

In consonance with the plan followed in Chapter-III and IV of the book, Prof. Tiwari focuses on "The Concept of Word-Meaning (Padārtha)" in Chapter-VI of the book. This chapter makes a transition from epistemology to metaphysics and ontology of the issue of word-meaning. Special feature of this chapter is the thumbnail view of as many as twelve different theories of meaning and their comparison with Bhartrhari's analysis of language by Prof. Tiwari's in the first half of the chapter.

Chapter-VII of the book titled "The Concept of Grammatical Analysis" looks more like an extension of the previous chapter. Here Prof. Tiwari discusses the root and stem distinction in a word, different theories relating to the meaning of suffixes and so on. Looked at closely Chapter-III and IV, Chapter-V and VI, and chapter VII and VIII form different sub-sections of the book and could have been marked so.

Chapter-VIII takes the problem of meaning stated in Chapter I to its broadest level namely 'Relation between Language and Meaning' which is incidentally also the title of this chapter. The focus of this chapter as Prof. Tiwari states, "— is confined to a critical survey of the cognitive and logical analysis of the problem of relation made by cognitive and logical analysis of the problem of relation made by Bhartrhari under the chapter 'Sambandha Sammuddesah', the chapter III of the third part of 'Vākyapadīya'. This chapter mainly deals with analysis of the views of other Indian philosophical systems namely Buddhism, Vaisesika, Mimāṃsa, Sāṃkhya and Vedānta as Bhartrhari deals with them." [p-377]

Chapter-IX which is the concluding chapter of the book is aptly titled 'Critical Estimate'. In this chapter Prof. Tiwari critically assesses the place for Bhartrhari's theory of meaning among the main approaches towards the study of language specially in the wake of recent developments in this area in the west. Prof. Tiwari

concludes that in an effort to provide a cognitive theory of language Bhartrhari “provides a philosophy free from metaphysical allegiance without feeling any philosophical requirement for a rejection of metaphysics.”
[p-406]

By the way of general comment on the book I believe that it is by far the most complete and comprehensive work on Bhartrhari’s philosophy that has hitherto been published in one single volume. The book is not only rich on lucidity of the exposition of the main concepts in Bhartrhari’s Vākyapadīya but is equally rich on an account of the polemic among different schools. Prof. Tiwari has given the western perspective to the problem wherever it seems necessary and possible. His experiment with reverse chronology namely, from sentence to the word-meaning, I think facilitates the reader towards a better understanding of issues at hand. The book is replete with references giving cues to the reader for further reading. Overall I think this book is a milestone as far as studies of Bhartrhari’s philosophy are concerned. Looking at the quality of paper, the hardbound edition of this 434 pages book is very reasonably priced by ICPR at 530 Indian Rupees.

AJAY VERMA
University of Delhi