Sabda Sakti
Power of Words in India's Linguistic Tradition

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Abstract

Language is always cultural, it is shaped by and in turn shapes the cultural context from which it emerges. To understand the power of words in a country it is essential to understand the host culture. In Sanskrit, and in Indian languages derived from Sanskrit, like Hindi and Bengali, the term *Sakti* has been a cultural concept since the *Vedic* age. "There is no word of wider content in any language than this Sanskrit term meaning 'Power'" (Woodroffe, p.17). In the Indian conceptualization of *Sabda Sakti*, which means the 'Power of the Word', language is seen from the earliest times as creative and mora power both at cosmic and human levels. Modern science sees energy as the ultimate form of reality. In India language has been worshipped and used as a manifestation of the creative energy of the goddess *Saraswati* since the *Rg Veda*.

This article traces the evolution of the concept of *Sabda Sakti* from the time it first occurs in the *Rg Veda*. This cultural conceptualization of language continues later in the *Atharva Veda* and *Yajur Veda* in the form of religious and cultural practices. In later Indian classical texts like the *Brahmanas*, the *Aranyakas*, and the *Upanishads*, *Sabda Sakti* is related to the origin of the universe, and the umbilical relationship of the cosmic energy and human speech is recognised. These ancient notions of *Sabda Sakti* were restated and further developed in *Kashmir Shaivism* in the 10th and 11th centuries. While the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* emphasized the contemplative aspect of *Sabda Sakti*, the *Shaiva* texts focused more on language as moralized power which is active and can be used for action. The study of Indian concept of *Sabda Sakti* as a cultural schema can be helpful in a better understanding of cultural roots of language and communication in India, and can contribute to further research in the field of cultural linguistics.

Keywords: *Veda, Upanishad, Cultural Linguistics, Indian Culture, Intercultural Communication.*

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a trend of scholars' call, especially from the non-Western world, against the domination of Western paradigms in social sciences, particularly in linguistics and communication studies. Recent works in this field have questioned of appropriateness of the Western social science paradigms for the non-Western societies (Alatas, 2006; Chen, 2018; Gluck, 2018; Gunaratne, 2010; Li, 2020; Miike, 2019, 2017,2016; Mowlana, 2019). The main concern of these scholars is the unequal intellectual dominance of the "professional center of gravity in the USA", and, to a lesser degree, European academics. As Western theories and concepts do not always reflect the issues and debates in the developing countries, critics propose an epistemic shift toward a greater diversity of academic perspectives, leading to a greater diversity of fundamental theories, approached and concepts worldwide (Gluck, 2018, p.2).

Eurocentrism, a term often used for Westernism, has been defined as the "procrustean forcing of cultural heritage neatly into a single paradigmatic perspective in which Europe is seen as the unique source of meaning, as the world's center of gravity. Eurocentric thinking attributes to the "West" an almost providential sense of historical destiny" (Shohat and Stam, 2013, p.2). As another contemporary scholar further elaborates, "The idea behind Eurocentricity in its most vile form, whatever its theoretical manifestation, is that Europe is the standard and nothing exists in the same category anywhere. It is the valorization of Europe above all other cultures and societies that makes it such a racist system" (Asante, 2014, p.6-7).

In the Indian context, the assault on its cultural traditions was first officially announced by William Wiberforce in his 1813 speech to the English Parliament in which he argued that the English must ensure the conversion of the country to Christianity as the most effective way of bringing it to "civilization". In 1835, Governor General Macaulay knocked down the entire intellectual output of India in his absurd statement that, "a single shelf of good European library was worth the whole native literature of India…"

(Alvares, 2011, p.73). It is distressing that even as India approaches seventy-five years of independence from British colonialism, so many educated segments and educational institutions in the country still continue to sustain the "apemanship and parrotry" knowledge structure of the West (ibid.).

In a recent in-depth study on Eurocentrism, specifically focused on Hegel's views on Indian culture and philosophy, Signoracci (2017), observes that Hegel "had more to do with the suppression or exclusion of the Indian traditions from the history and practice of philosophy in Europe and elsewhere than may be thought, and there is much to do to reverse this trend" (p.253). He further observes that Indian philosophy's "historical prominence and continuing vitality show its considerable sophistication and render it- perhaps not solely, but certainly uniquely – capable of posing a challenge to the assessment Hegel delivers" (ibid. p.233).

J.S. Yadav, former Director of Indian Institute of Mass Communication, has observed that Western communication models and methodologies do not really help in understanding and explaining communication events, phenomena and processes in the context of Indian society and culture. Western models and methodologies are not very appropriate for Indian conditions. He has emphasized the need to develop and refine Indian or Eastern way of looking at language and communication and use appropriate research methods for studying communication events and processing. (Yadava, p. 191). In Indian culture, saints and sages have traditionally been opinion leaders communicating the norms and values for righteous social behavior on the part the individuals. Their role as communicators who influence communication at various levels is important even today and needs to studied to bring Indian communication model closer to the lived reality of the people of India (ibid. p. 194).

This article presents a conceptualization of language-culture relation in a combined cultural-linguistic perspective in the Indian context. The main perspective is cultural and it draws on the religious and philosophical dimensions of Indian culture. The secondary perspective is linguistic and it focuses on the linguistic flows as cultural flows

globally. (Palmer, P.87). The Indian concept of *Sabda Sakti* is a cultural schema which can be helpful not only in a better understanding of cultural roots of language and in India and but also in accepting its role in promoting intercultural communication.

Cultured Language

The relationship of language and culture has been at the center of the philosophical and linguistic conceptualizations in Indian tradition since the ancient times. These conceptualizations were never organized into a separate discipline and these concepts were never explicitly formulated. "It was essentially an interdisciplinary scholarship which either postulated common explanatory categories or developed parallel constructs with the same significance to make the models functionally optional and efficient" (Kapoor, DPG, p.4). It is therefore most surprising that we find an almost total disjunction between the study of classical Indian philosophical and linguistic tradition and the modern theories of language and communication. Only recently have we seen a revival of interest in India in the heritage of our traditional knowledge (Kapoor, 2010; Matilal, 2014; Ram Swaroop, 2011; Tripathi, 2018; Vatsyayan, 2016; Malhotra, 2020).

A strong tradition of linguistic analysis that developed in India in the first millennium BC and has continued uninterrupted to modern times. Fields of phonetics and grammar were recognized first. By the early fourth century BC, Pāṇini composed a complete grammar of Sanskrit that generates utterances from basic elements under semantic and co-occurrence conditions. The grammar utilizes sophisticated techniques of reference, a formal meta-language, and abstract principles of rule precedence (Allen, 1953; Vasu, 1988; Kiparsky. 2002; Deshpande 2011). The long tradition of grammatical commentary that followed Panini's work investigated subtleties of verbal cognition in discussion with well-developed philosophical disciplines of logic and ritual exegesis. *Sabda* became a unifying term referring to word, sentence, sound, meaning, discourse, and language, all indicating a way to gain insight into the nature of the Absolute Reality or *Brahma*.

The study of language and communication in India was never a monopoly of the logicians or the rhetoricians, as it was in Greece. Almost all schools of thought in India began their discussions from the fundamental problem of communication (Coward and Raja, p.3). The scholar-saints of the Vedic age were greatly concerned with the powers and limitations of language a means of communicating their personal experiences of a visionary nature to their kinsmen and they tried to exhibit the power of language by various means. They praised the power of language by identifying it with the powerful goddess *Saraswati* ready to give desired results to her devotees. The entire creation was attributed by some sages to divine language, and it was generally accepted that ordinary speech of mortals was only a part of that language.

The goal of Indian thought on language and communication is not mere rational knowledge, but also experience of the Absolute Reality. Knowledge of language resulting in correct speech not only communicates meaning but also enables one to experience reality. This is the meaning of the Indian term *darsana,* which literally means *"vision"*. It is this feature that sets Indian linguistics apart from modern western perspectives on language. From the early Vedas and Upanishads the Indian approach to language and communication has never been limited to composition and transmission. All aspects of the mundane world and human experience were regarded as enlightened by language. Linguistics in India always had and continues to have both phenomenal and metaphysical dimensions. (Agrawala, 1953, 1963; Jha, 2010).

Interest in studying the relationship between language and culture in the West emerged three thousand years later, in the eighteenth century. William Jones, Charles Wilkins, Franz Bopp, and Wilhelm Von Humboldt, were among the early scholars in Europe who became aware of the relationship of Sanskrit with the languages of Europe (Staal, 1996, p. 36). They explored the relationship between language, reality and culture and emphasized that diversity of language was one of the central facts about human civilization and potentially, at least, had implications for natural and social situations. In the 19th-century the idea of 'linguistic relativity' was first clearly expressed by German linguists, Humboldt and Herder who saw language as the expression of the spirit of a nation, and the diversity of languages as diversity of views of the world. This

principle was further developed in the twentieth century with an explicit reference to Einstein's theory of relativity. This amounted to maintaining that the differences between the languages of the speaker and the listener had to be taken in to account in any analysis of social and cultural life. Just as in Einstein's theory of relativity the velocity and the direction of the observer had to be taken into account to determine those of any other person or object. In neither language nor in physical reality there was a fixed point or center from where everything else could be judged. (Einstein, 1952; Heisenberg, 1962; Bohr, 1958; Bohm, 1980; Prigogine, 1977; Rovelli, 2017).

Around the same time Franz Boas came up with the idea of cultural relativity, which holds that cultures cannot be objectively ranked as higher or lower, or better or more correct, but that all humans see the world through the lens of their own culture, and judge it according to their own culturally acquired norms (Leavitt, 2019). Cultural relativity stresses the equal worth of all cultures and languages, it sees no such thing as a primitive language and considers all languages as capable of expressing the same meaning, through widely differing structures. Boas saw language as an inseparable part of culture and he was among the first to study and document verbal culture in the original language.

Different orientations adopted to study the relationship between language and culture are partly due to the difficulty in defining the terms language and culture. Views of language have in recent years ranged from language as action, language as social practice, language as a cognitive system, and language as a complex adaptive system. Culture has similarly been viewed differently by different schools of thought. It has been seen as a cognitive system, a symbolic system, as social practice, or as a construct (Sharifian, 2019, p.3). These orientations are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The boundaries between theories, and between disciplines of study, are always porous and dynamic, as indeed all aspects of reality are.

In the West, since the time of Aristotle, a view has been widespread that all humans think in the same way, and that language merely serves to code and communicate already formed thoughts. Such a view is fundamental to such philosophical systems as

Cartesian rationalism, Locke's empiricism and Kant's idealism. This kind of universalism is carried on today by the dominant mode of linguistics. People trained in linguistics and communication studies tend to see culture through the lens of language.

Culture is typically seen by the linguists as a kind of extension of language. Among the people trained in fields like cultural studies this language determined view of culture is considered biased. From a cultural studies perspective, many features of human languages are entrenched in cultural concepts, including cultural frames, models or schemata (Palmer 1996; Sharifian, 2011). In his path breaking book, *Toward a Theory of Cultural Linguistics*, Palmer observed that " It is likely that all native knowledge of language and culture belongs to cultural schemas and the living of culture and the speaking of language consist of schemas in action" (ibid. p. 63).

Absolutely Real

India is the one country in the world, best exemplifying an ageless, unbroken tradition of speculations about language and communication (Padoux, p.1). This linguistic tradition includes extensive explorations and rules of phonetics and grammar; diverse philosophies on the value and nature of language; and the phenomenal and transcendental power of language and communication. At one level language has been identified in Indian tradition with the Absolute Reality, the *Brahma*, and at another level it has been identified with meaningful and disciplined speech, *Sabdanusanam*. Throughout the ages, theories and practice of language have evolved in India, elements of which can be identified, at different periods in time, in almost all of the thought systems that arose here (Staal, 1996, p.2).

Conceptualizations about language and communication constitute an intellectual tradition in India, in which speech, emerging at the time of creation, is seen as creative and efficient power, an energy (S*akti)*, which is both cosmic and human. This creative power can be accessed by human beings through structured language, which serves as a medium or channel through which knowledgeable and skilled persons can reach the

higher levels of coherence and cohesion of language and reality. These conceptualizations are present as early as the Vedas and maintain continuity through texts on phonetics (*siksa, and pratisakhya*), the epics (*Mahabharata*), the works of grammarians (*sabdanusanam*), the Upanishads, the philosophies (*darsanas*), and the texts on the arts (Verma 1961; Sastri 2015; Ranganathananda, 2015; Tagore; 2018; Tripathi, 2018).

Earliest conceptualization of language as S*akti* can be found in the Vedas, where the notion of creative role of language is present widely, most significantly in *Rg Veda* Book X. Hymn X.71 speaks of rare and shining treasures hidden in language which are disclosed to those who have the insight and affection in their speech. When language is used with insight and care it wins the cooperation of other persons. (*Rg Veda*, p.809-15). But only those who make the effort and have the right intention can speak and comprehend language in the right way. A person who has not understood the essence of the spoken word can only use language that is superficial and hollow. Good communication skill comes to those who words are trustworthy and reflect the integrity of the person. People have similar sense organs but their comprehension and expression is not the same. Knowledge and experience enables a person to use the power of words to understand and conceptualize reality in most beneficial way. An energized, dynamic, and knowledgeable person is successful in practical life and wins goodwill and admiration in society. (Sondhi, 2020, p.6).

Hymn X.125 goes further and extols the powers and grandeur of the speech goddess in a lengthy *Vak Sukta*. It identifies and glorifies *Vak* or speech as a supreme power which supports the gods and the sages, and their position in the cosmic and the phenomenal world. It gives strength and treasures to the faithful ones who perform their duties. In this hymn, speech is identified with the cosmic energy and the same time with the voice of the people of knowledge and action in the human society. While the power of the speech is considered to be of the nature of cosmic energy, and which resides with the gods, at the same time this power and energy is within the reach of the people who have faith and whose knowledge and action makes them trustworthy (*Rg Veda*, p.1113-1117).

One can see in these two hymns seeds of the later flowering of Indian conceptualizations of language and communication in connection with both the absolute and the apparent reality. The integrative and flowing movement of language between the grossest and subtlest levels of reality is the core of the Indian concept of communication.

The *Upanishads* continue the *Vedic* tradition of recognizing the value of language for human beings for realizing their material and spiritual goals. While references to speech and language can be found in most of the Upanishads, two representative selections from *Brhad-aranyaka and Katha Upanishad* beautifully sum up the conceptualization of language as cosmic energy in these texts. In Chapter VI.2, speech is considered as the abode of the Absolute Reality, *Brahma*. Absolute Reality resides in speech, it is supported by space, and deserves to be honored as consciousness. By speech alone can one identify the people with whom one can cooperate, acquire the knowledge that is in the texts, interpretations, and activities. The Absolute Reality is, in truth, speech. By recognizing and imbibing the true value and energy of speech one can even become a god (Radhakrishnan, p.246).

In *Katha Upanishad*, in Chapter II.16, the essence of all the Vedic texts is said to exist in the syllable *Om*. It can be compared with metaphor of seed given in *Chandyoga Upanishad* to indicate that the essence of the tree exists inside the invisible depths of the seed. Similarly, a single syllable, indestructible *akshara*, is seen as the microcosmic formless essence of the Absolute Reality. Knowledge of this everlasting spirit gives capability to a person to achieve all that he desires in life (ibid. p.616). Words are a real spacetime sample of illimitable and dimensionless cosmic energy, constituted of matter, radiation, light, consciousness, and action. This text from *Katha Upanishad* asserts that there is nothing that an insightful person cannot achieve through the knowledge and use of proper language, which is a symbol of the divine energy (Padoux, p.18).

From the Vedic times language had a divine and human quality at the same time. There is no contradiction here. Indian conceptualizations of language and communication are holistic and practical, and they are far from being mere imaginations unrelated with objective reality. This is brought out even more clearly in the texts of Bhartrihari and

Abhinavagupta in the later periods (Iyer, 1971, 1992; Pillai, 1971; Furlinger, 2009). These texts are based on the integral relationship established between language, Absolute Reality and objective reality. Absolute Reality, or divine energy, or *Brahma* and *Shiva*, in its essential nature, is speech, and activity through speech. Everything related to language, communication and objective reality has an umbilical relationship with Absolute Reality. Since Absolute Reality is all pervasive and omnipresent, and since everything emerges from it, language is a manifestation of the un-manifest supreme reality.

The ancient Indian notions about the nature and power of the word or speech, appearing in the *Vedas, Upanishads* and the Grammatical texts, are further developed, with identical or very close meanings, in *Kashmir Saiva* texts (Padoux, p.5). In these texts the essentially symbolic role of *kundalini* as an energy that is both cosmic and present within human beings is repeatedly emphasized to emphasize the correspondence between human and the cosmic levels (**Para-Trisika-Vivarna**, 2017; Siva Sutras, 2017). From this energy, which is all pervading and is of the nature of *Sabdabrahma*, a familiar concept in Bhartrihari's V*akyapadia* (Iyer 1992; Pillai, 1971), *Sakti,* or phenomenal power is generated, which in turn leads to the four levels of speech: *Para, Pasyanti, Madhyama, and Vaikhari.* It is in the last stage of *Vaikhari,* that human language and communication becomes manifest. Language is made of three powers of will, cognition, and action, and it is endowed with the properties of created things, which include the cycle of birth, growth and transformation. Language thus becomes an integral part of the Absolute Reality, conceptualized as *Sabda Sakti.*

Sakti is the cosmic energy that manifests the general potential creativity of *Siva* into specific names and forms of *Sabda* or sound. The most pervasive principle that Abhinavagupta uses in his texts is *sarvam savatmakam*, variously translated as "everything is related to the totality", "every part is related to the whole", \ "omnifariousness", and "omnipresence of all in all", "everything is of the nature of all". This doctrine has antecedents going back to *Atharva Veda*, where Indra's Net symbolizes the cosmos as a web of connections and interdependences (Malhotra, 2016, p.4).

Abhinavagupta not only espouses and applies this principle, he goes as well into an extensive interpretation of a verse from *Mahabharata* which exemplifies this omni-pervasiveness (Baumer, p. 270). The *Shantiparva* verse 47.84 says that "Everything is in you. Everything is from you. You Yourself are Everything. Everywhere are you. You are always the All. Salutations to you in your form as Everything" (*Mahabharata*, Vol 5, p.146). An earlier verse, 47.47, throws more light on deeper roots of the concept of *Sabda Sakti*. It says, "Roots with all kinds of affixes and suffixes are your limbs. The Sandhis are your joints. The consonants and the vowels are your ornaments. The Vedas have declared you to be the divine word. Salutations to you in your form as the word" (ibid. 143).

Sakti, the divine power, is the essential nature of the Absolute Reality itself. It is the radiating, pulsating, vibrating, brilliant, dynamic and absolute free power, which is essentially pure light and supreme joy, the core, the heart of Reality, of everything. In its different forms and stages it is the essential nature of all that exists in the world. *Sakti* is in a blade of grass, a dust particle, humans, rocks, water, trees, animals, a spiral nebula in the sky, an atom, a thought, a sensation, and in *Akshara* and *Sabda-* and at the same time it transcends the world and is in *Brahma*. In this way the *Kashmir Advaita* notion of *Sabda Sakti* is closer to the *Vishishta Adavita* of Ramanuja than the *Advaita Vedanta* of Shankara (Furlinger, p.249).

Abhinavagupta's conceptualization of language and reality in *Tantraloka* makes it abundantly clear that unity and diversity are the aspects of same integrated wholeness which is in a state of constant vibration or pulsation (*spandan*), and change. In verse III.100 of *Tantraloka*, Abhinavagupta explicitly says that if the Absolute Reality did not manifest itself in infinite variety, but remained enclosed in its own singular unity, it would neither be the supreme power nor awareness. It is the nature of Absolute Reality, and language, to expand and diversify in infinite forms. Incessant creativity or consciousness is the essence of its absoluteness, and this is the eternal source of all linguistic forms and constructions. (Siva Sutras, p. xxi).

This view of language seems somewhat similar to the present day view of language and reality in quantum physics. Language may be seen as a coherent wave that represents the potential of all outcomes that exist simultaneously in superposition or overlapping state, as a field of potentialities (Wendt, p. 217). While language as a whole, with all its levels from *Para* to *Vaikhari*, is in a sort of quantum coherent state, meaning is actually communicated at the level of its decoherence, or *Vaikhari*, or speech. What brings about the transformation in language from a field of potential meanings into actual ones is the will and act of speech. It is speech as interaction that puts language into a context, with both other words and particular listener. Words are stored in consciousness not as isolated entities, but as nodes in a network of connected or entangled words. They communicate meaning when intentionally and willfully used in a certain chosen order in particular context.

The vibration, energy, and manifestation of the *Sabda* or *Brahma* or Absolute Reality, is not disorderly or disparate movement of its subtle constituent elements and forms. Both in thought and language, letters, words, and sentences are not randomly flying off in different directions, not even in insane beings. There is always a pattern, an order, which can be identified on closer consideration. The underlying pattern in Indian languages is integrative and accommodative and the objective is always interaction, coordination and sustenance. Language is creative and evolving on the hand; on the other it connects, unifies and upholds. The power of language to connect and comprehend the incessant flow of our sense perceptions and uphold the Absolute Reality is nothing short of a miracle, a divine gift, conceptualized in the term *Sabda Sakti*.

From the foregoing it is evident that the primary concern of Indian thought on language and communication has been its efficient and discerning use to support, sustain and strengthen all existence and this does not exclude divinity. The original word, identical with the divine energy is seen in this perspective as phonic energy, which is eternal, indestructible, subtle, and illimitable, which however evolves and unfolds through different stages and forms, and brings forth, names, or identifies, minutely and precisely, all the various kinds and dimensions of objects. Language, then, is inherently

endowed with creative energy. The creative energy precedes the object, it is the creative energy of the Absolute Reality in the form of speech that defines and upholds the objects, their relations, and the entire order of nature.

Moralized Power

Ethical and practical issues in the process of intercultural communication have received significant scholarly attention in recent years. From a review of recent works in this regard Miike (2019) has formulated five principles of communication ethics from a practical perspective: mutual respect; reaffirmation and renewal; identification and indebtedness; sustainability; and openness. Indian linguistic and communication tradition is a testimony of the abiding value of these principles, both in theory and in practice.

At the outset, we must know that the word *Sakti* comes from the root *Sak* which means "to be able", "to do". It indicates both activity and the capacity to do so. In a sense the world and its each constituent element is *Sakti*. But this activity is not random, anarchical or disorderly action. The concept of *Rta* in Indian tradition stands for order and coexistence. Everything that exists in the world and beyond is in an order which sustains the system and its parts at the same time. Power translated to the material plane is only one and the grossest aspect of *Sakti*. But all the material aspects are limited forms of the great creative and sustaining power of the Absolute Reality, the *Brahma* or *Siva*. *Sakti* is moralized by the essential unity and coexistence of all diverse forms in the *Siva* the Absolute Reality, which is inclusive, interconnected and interdependent. *Sakti* is therefore always in the service of the right, the good, and the moral (Woodroffe, p. 122).

In the Indian linguistic and cultural tradition, goddess *Sarasvati* is a symbol of *Sakti* or creative energy at both cosmic and human levels. *Sarasvati* is the most important cultural symbol and source of all thoughts, insights, speech, and learning. Meanings, meaningful language, names, forms, and objects are also believed to have originated

from her. She is the creator of all arts and music too. Above all, she is the source of life-giving perennial rivers which sustain all creation on earth (Ludvik, 2007). This *Rg Vedic* ideal of language, thought and action runs through Panini's *Ashtadhyayi*, Patanjali's *Mahabhashya*, Bharatmuni's *Natyashastra*, Bhartrihari's *Vakyapadia*, and Abhinavagupta's *Tantraloka*, to name just a few of classical texts in India's long and insightful linguistic tradition which is the core of Indian culture (Agrawal, 1963,1953; Ghosh, 2016; Iyer, 1971, 1992; Baumer, 2021). This tradition is the reverse of trying to have control or command over language to "accomplish some tangible business goal" or change the way others think and feel (Garcia, p.235). Language and communication in Indian tradition is considered as a divine energy to be used in speech with utmost care and affection to bring people together for collective good, or *Dharma* and keep them away from evil, or *Adharma*.

This practical and ethical view of language and communication is most clearly brought out in the concluding verses of the *Rg Veda,* "The light of lights which illuminates all life and elements, which enlightens speech in the form of supreme word 'Om', may bring prosperity to all. Let us all walk together, talk together, and think together to acquire knowledge, and live together like knowledgeable people for the common good. Let our meetings, thoughts, feelings, and consciousness be for common objectives. Let us all have the collective determination to bring our hearts and minds together so that we can live together in harmony" (*Rg Veda*, p.1265-66). The Sanskrit root *Sam,* which means together, or common, is writ large over all the prayers in *Rg Veda* and other classical texts and even in modern Indian languages. Two words *Sanskriti,* and *Sanskrit,* may be translated as culture and language. The root for both words is *Sam*. Both culture and language are thus understood in India in terms of common creation or heritage. Even the word *Samvad*, which means communication, has same root *Sam*, and the same essence-togetherness. Indian parliament, *Samsad,* is again, togetherness. "Sam refers to the xperience of completetness, totality and perfection, which is cognate with the English word 'sum' (Malhotra, 2020, p.35).

Nirukta, considered the oldest Indian treatise on etymology, philology, and semantics believed to have been composed around 500 BC (Sarup, 1966, p.54), maintained that

Vedic language was the only language that corresponded very closely to the composite and dynamic nature of the reality at both absolute and apparent levels. Since the Absolute Reality is both integrated and dynamic, the *Kriya*, denoting *Karma,* or action is the primary part of the sentence and all other parts of the sentence, - the subject, the object, etc. - are only modes of the word (Raju, p.66). The words denoting activity are to be considered as primary and the rest as secondary. Words, sentences and language asking us to act in order like cosmic energy are important and other sentences are subsidiary (ibid. p.67).

Paniniya Siksa mentions six merits of a good speech that connects the speaker and the listener in the right manner: politeness, clarity, distinctive words, right accent, and time adherence. The six demerits are: singsong manner, nodding of head, too fast speed, written script, low voice and ignorance of meaning. Speech that is made with defective accent or pronunciation is considered poor and not capable of connecting with the listener in right manner. In fact, it may convey a wrong meaning that will do more harm than good to the speaker. A good and effective speaker should observe proper accent and places of articulation, use proper gestures, and above all know the meaning of what he is saying (Ghosh, 1938, p.72-79). These fundamental rules of good speech formulated by Panini continued to be followed by Patanjali, Bharatmuni, Bhartrihari, and Abhinavagupta, and are considered crucial for good communication even today.

Mahabharata mentions politeness in language as one thing that can bring glory and success to a person who practices this communication skill (*Mahabharata,* Vol.5, p.271). In *Bhagvadgita,* which "coined hundreds of the words that we use in daily life" (Radhakrishnan, p.9), learning from classic texts and practice of disciplined speech is advocated for communication that is truthful, beneficial, and polite. Indian classical texts formulated these principles of good communication more than three thousand years before Dale Carnegie wrote the bestseller, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Indian view of language and communication is a holistic and dynamic view that joins, links, coordinates and brings people together. Not in the sense of monotonous uniformity, and not in the sense of erasing all the differences, but in the sense of unity in diversity, shared commonalties along with differences. This tradition of insightful,

accommodative, and integrative speech is India's major contribution towards building '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam*' or global family (Sondhi, 2017).

In the *Upanishads* also this practical and ethical aspect of language is re-emphasized. The *Chandogya Upanishad* says that "if there was no speech, neither right nor wrong would be known, neither the true nor the false, neither the good nor the bad, neither the pleasing nor the unpleasing. Speech, indeed, makes all this known" (Radhakrishnan, p. 470). In *Tattiriya Upanishad*, after teaching the Veda, the teacher instructs the pupils to speak the truth, practice virtue, practice welfare, achieve prosperity, continue study and discussion, and perform duties to gods and parents (ibid. p.537). The importance of activity is stressed in *Isa Upanishad*, when it says that one should wish to live a hundred years always performing works. (ibid. 569). The *Upanishads* generally conceive the Absolute Reality as the light of lights. Light is the principle of communication. In this sense, language is the expression of the character of the Absolute Reality (ibid. p. 62).

One way we can frame an Indian communication model is to describe it as holistic, innermost and multidimensional coordination through the creative power of language. That is, language and communication that originates from all dimensions of being – physical, emotional, rational, cultural, and spiritual, and seeks to reach out to as many aspects as possible of the listener. Inherently, then, language evolves out of a clear understanding of the wider social, universal and cosmic context of the speaker and the listener. A primary assumption of this view is that the coordination we so earnestly seek does exist in all language. Our ideas, feelings, and language spring from the rich foundation of our common human and cosmic identity, at the most fundamental level, we are part of the same fabric of being amidst all existence.

The *Saraswati Rahsya Upanishad*, which belongs to the category of minor *Upanishads,* and which may have been composed around the end of 13th century AD (Warrier, p. vi), is exclusively devoted to the power of words as symbolized in the image of goddess *Saraswati*, a conceptualization that was first seen in the *Rg Veda*. This short *Upanisad* is an invocation to goddess *Saraswati* to bestow her divine powers to her worshippers for their well-being and prosperity.

The opening verse of the *Saraswati Rahasya Upanisad* says that speech is rooted in thought and thought is rooted in speech. This connectivity and complementarity of speech and thought has now been scientifically established in neuroscience, as quantum physics has established the connectivity and complementarity of all existence as known to us. The same verse further says that we shall speak what is righteous and what is true; we shall hear what is good, see what is good, and shall have strength to enjoy the divine gift of human life (*Upanisad Ank*, p. 666).

Language is considered in this *Upanisad* as the meaningful essence of all texts, which is expressed in different ways. Language exists in countless forms in words, sentences and compositions, and their meanings, and it is without beginning or end. It brings prosperity to all through meaningful action and helps them achieve clarity of mind. Language makes knowledgeable and practical people conscious of their obligations, and motivates them to be polite and truthful in their communications. The meaning of words is apparent only partially, the complete meaning is not expressible in words and has to be understood contextually through insights acquired by those who are knowledgeable and experienced (ibid. p.667).

The *Saraswati Rahasya Upanisad* explicitly relates the power of language with the image of the river. Goddess *Saraswati*, which first emerged as a river, is seen as manifesting the ocean of cosmic energy in the form of incessant creative activity in its eternal flow, supporting, sustaining, and strengthening all life on earth. The divine manifestation in the form of language similarly confers creative thought, speech and action on everyone who faithfully strives for it. (ibid.)

Conclusion

It is the premise of this article that problems in language and communication within and between different cultures and societies stem from a complex web of linguistic, social, and cultural factors that go beyond any individual, or situation. It is argued that to find a solution to this problem we need to look within a society and examine the disconnect

between its language and culture. India's rich linguistic heritage is embedded in its composite and integrated culture. It is therefore imperative that problems in language proficiency and competence in India should be resolved on the basis of cultural foundations of Indian languages.

The Indian communication model is based on the structure of language as an ascending hierarchy of conceptual abstraction between the base level of physical reality, the materiality of language, through intermediate levels of abstraction, to the highest levels of abstraction - *Sabda Brahman* or *Paramasiva* – where linguistic form merges with Absolute Reality beyond language and thought. While the connection of the basic linguistic terms with sense perceptions of everyday experiences is of fundamental importance, comprehension of the connections between our sense perceptions in their totality require logically derived concepts at different levels of abstraction. The concept of *Sabda Sakti* symbolizes the creative energy of language in Indian tradition that connects and integrates the highest and lowest levels of abstraction seamlessly, gracefully, and in holistically, not loosing touch with reality at different levels.

This communication model to a large extent is shaped by the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, the diverse philosophical schools and traditions, and a treasure of ideas and practices stemming from India's composite cultural heritage. This legacy contributes to a diverse and yet coherent Indian way of communication in a flowing movement. Only a few of such classical texts have been studied so far with regard to their contribution towards the evolution of an Indian communication model. Towards this end, Indian classical texts relating to language need to be explored further and relevant ideas stemming from them adopted for integrative and accommodative language and communication in India and the world.

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