

Course 203 B (Bhartrihari)

In Indian philosophy as well as western philosophy, there is a great controversy among the Indian philosophers whether knowledge is independent from language or not. Bhartrihari, a grammarian philosopher of 5th century proposed a thesis that verbal ability is independent in our cognitive faculty. In fact, it is claimed that the cognitive faculty operates necessarily with the verbal faculty. B.K. Motilal has considered two versions of Bhartrihari's thesis----- strong and weak. According to strong version, all cognitive episodes are equivalent to verbal thoughts. This version denied many primitive, pre-linguistic, non verbal experience from the domain of awareness, episode and declares them to be non cognitive in character. A weaker version will allow, however, for certain primitive, paralinguistic, cognitive episode among which we can put the so called pure sensory experience. According to the weaker version, most cognitive episodes are verbal thought at some implicit level. But B.K. Motilal is not clear whether Bhartrihari, indeed, his thesis in the strong version.

In this regard the Buddhists, the Naiyayikas and the Mimamsakas have argued that there are two types of perceptual awareness –nirvikalpaka and savikalpaka. It is supposed that nirvikalpaka is sensory experience where no concept and hence no language or word (sabda) is verbal and the savikalpaka is one where word and concept are essentially present. According to nirvikalpaka jnana, one has to do only with pure object; there the word has no place. But Bhartrihari maintains an opposite view. According to him, even in the so called nirvikalpaka (non conceptual) state, the awareness is interpreted with word or vagrupata. Such vagrupata cannot be aware of an object, and will not illuminate.

Bhartrihari has said that, even a new born baby acts, cries, sucks its mother's breast etc. by virtue of awareness, where the seed of sabda bhavana or penetration must have been sown. All our activities are implicitly prompted by some specific awareness of some purpose or other. The instinctual awareness of babies prompts them to act, to cry or even to afford, to articulate their first words. It must be a sort of awareness where the purpose and the method to achieve the purpose are distinguished, and it presupposes discrimination (vimorsa) .

The Buddhists point out that the child's first perception cannot be thus impregnated with the word seed. The child does not have even sanketa i.e. conventional word meaning. Bhartrhari says that the child's first perception cannot be completely innocent of determination by word, otherwise it would be impossible to explain satisfactorily his attempt to articulate a word through his vocal organ and learn the conventional meaning. A sanketa grahana (learning of the conventional meaning words) takes the following form looking at a cow the child learns the use of the word "cow" from the instructions such as 'this is cow' or 'this is called cow'. Here the ascription of the word or even the predicate cow would be impossible unless the presentation of the subject of the sentence by vimorsa or paraamorsa (determination). For the presentation of the in the sentence, speaker uses 'this' and this is a clearly vimorsa. The child understands the subject by some similar vimarsa – an implicitly word, impregnated awareness. Explicit of the word is not necessary as it has been already emphasized. Even pointing of the finger or nodding of the head would represent impregnated awareness.