

Signification and Resolution of Absolute in a Textual Structure: A Study in Relation to Bhartrhari and Jacques Lacan

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Epistemic categories, due upon their relative nature, incessantly form a chain of relations to finally result into the formation of structures, which further conforming to the meanings of each other, in an each to each relation, form a bigger structure that emerges with a wholesome meaning. A structure owes its immediate existence always to its meaning. If it is not meaningful, it won't be conceded to be a structure, as a structure is not just a combination of various constitutive units which in themselves are dysfunctional and of no consequence, but it is a hierarchically progressed formation, where constituents combine on their relational affinity or interface sacrificing/ contributing their meanings to the cause of the configuration of this meaningful structure as a whole. Dialectical investigation of the evolution of meaning in a structure, lent by the conventions/traditions of a language community that does not insist upon the perpetual deferral of meaning in the created linguistic entity, can be done when and only when the dual quality that is, of being *prakāśya* and *prakāśaka* of a linguistic unit or *śabda* or even otherwise a sign is well understood.

Whether it is Indian or Western tradition of knowledge, in both the semiological issues are dealt with the semantic goals, which even philosophically can be verified, as meaning has always been the ultimate objective of any subject, object or predicate. In its absence the only thing that persists is crisis, crisis to the being of existing entity. In both the traditions, knowledge is observed to have been inseparably associated with the language factor. Both view the world as a fruit of lexical confluences in a linguistically formed structure, where the basic insistence is upon the creation and creation presupposes semantic clarity assisted by the creative faculty of the body, functioning as the source of formational instinct. This creation of identity is universally the same, irrespective of any rule or law of a particular language; it keeps on forming the unformed forms, unevolved entities and inconfigured meanings. Thorough investigation of the formation of meaning in the textual/conceptual forms has very clearly shown the method of processing of an individual meaningless (in the context of real/true meaning) unit, which is not even distantly predictable to have the relation

with a meaningful linguistic entity to be formed by it in connection with the other similar units.

Jacques Lacan, a significant exponent of post-structuralist movement, who, being a psychoanalyst, tries to understand the psychological postulations through the semiotic deductions and semantic presumptions of structuralist movement, where he starts with the Saussurean propositions, but following the varied tracks and devising new ways reaches a destination which undoubtedly is poststructuralist. Lacan, who like Bhartrhari is less radical and more logical in his expositions, is indispensably important in the present discussion on the formation of meaning in a conceptual content. He, in his analysis, very suitably proves the point that signification is common to both, linguistics and psychology, which, if broadly analysed, suggests that signification is all pervading, and it is its immanence that unceasingly makes this world exist. Lacan very well analyses Saussurean propositions and understands them in the poststructuralist framework through the proper illustration of the applicability of the Saussurean formulations. He, like Bhartrhari and Saussure, believes in the final resolution of the meaning of a signifier but this actualization of meaning which, for Saussure, is concretely obtained and takes place in the consciousness, is the formation of unremitting series of signification, and its resolution takes place in the unconscious, finally, it resolves in the unreal and therefore, 'reality' for Lacan is something 'impossible'. Lacan makes his move in the linguistic study from Saussure, whom he, like his other successors, attributes credit for many of the valuable propositions and particularly for giving a start to the modern linguistics. He takes up the Saussurean terms like signifier and signified as formulaic propositions and contends Saussure for considering them parallel to each other as he finds signifier over the signified and represents them by 'S' and 's' respectively, which find expression as a formula in the following manner:

$$\frac{S}{s}$$

For him 'S' or signifier does not directly lead to 's' signified but leads to another signifier which further leads to some other signifier and in this way the process of signification moves on and on which finally resolves in the unconscious where 'reality' being unattainable is not obtained. So, here, Lacan interfaces Saussure by refuting his conception of the functioning of signifier and signified, where unlike Saussure he says that an object is not identified/ constituted/recognized through this systematic processing of signifier giving way to signified and consequently sign, instead he is of the opinion that signifier leads to the other signifier and further to another, as signification utterly relies on another signification to take place. Lacan opines that in language an object is not formed as a thing [signifier + signified = sign (the thing referred)] but as a concept giving way to the further transactions; always decoding a linguistic code leads to another code and it further leads to some other and thus it continues as a search for the "meaning of meaning" to reach to the finally resolved signified of the signifier, which is hardly obtained. We have already come across Bhartrharian parallels to 'signifier' 'signified' and 'sign' in the preceding pages of the thesis, which indistinctly betray the similar characteristics. Lacan, unlike both Bhartrhari

and Saussure, who consider signifier/*sphoma* creative of signified/*vaikhaīy* and vice-versa, opines differently and shows primarily the dominance of signifier over signified; he contends that on looking the process of signification, “We are forced, then, to accept the notion of an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier” (Lacan 170), as, a signifier does not stay firmly even with the other signifiers led to, it keeps on leading to the other and another incessantly, that means Lacan is of the opinion that we cannot find the final signified of a signifier, it is unattainable owing to the persistent shift of signified, and thus rarely the process of signification would end. To illustrate his point, Lacan very convincingly rebuts Saussurean notion of signification by replacing his instance of the picture of a tree and its signified, which in Lacan’s eyes is not more than a part and parcel of the process of nomenclature, by the two bathroom doors which in all the ways are same but viewed differently because of the signifiers attached to them, they are perceived as different altogether from each other as the distinction is intrinsic in the signifiers “Ladies” and “Gentlemen” which each door bears respectively. Though the doors are identical they are recognized as different due to the signifiers used. Here, the signifier “Ladies” and “Gentlemen” lead to other signifiers, therefore, the clearly identical doors are perceived to be different, here signification leads to further signification, meaning of the identical doors is altered and due to the signifiers “Ladies” and “Gentlemen” another meaning is created which varies from the objects perceived identical. Emphasizing the fluidity in meaning of the signified, Lacan further cites an example of two small children, a little boy and a little girl:

A train arrives at a station. A little boy and a little girl, brother and sister, are seated in a compartment face to face next to the window through which the buildings along the station platform can be seen passing as the train pulls to a stop. ‘Look’, says the brother, ‘we are at ladies!’; ‘Idiot!’ replies his sister, ‘Can’t you see we’re at Gentlemen’ (167).

Here, in the example both the children contend each other as they are viewing two different signs at the same place. They are not ready to accept each other and come to a conclusion because of their different points of view, which actually create the difference in the signified. So, both the children, in their place, are right because whatever they clearly perceive are opining. Bhartṛhari, too, in respect of the same opines correspondingly, and like a predecessor of poststructuralist thoughts, considers meaning under the effect of the factors which poststructuralists concede to be crucial for the alteration in the meaning obtained in a particular state of affairs. Consider the following *śloka*:

*avasthādeśakālānām bhedādbhinnāsu śaktitu/
bhāvānāmanumānena prasiddhiratidurlabhā//32// (I: 3.)*

Here Bhartṛhari says that the nature of the substance or essence can rarely be defined and determined through the reasoning or even otherwise inference, as it differs with the change in *avasthādeśakālānām* (the state, place, and time). These three factors are the principle causes behind the variation in meaning, as change in any of

the aforesaid aspects leads to the change in meaning. Now, this vulnerability of the character of meaning quite explicitly exhibits its fluid nature, which poststructuralist theoreticians explained very well. The poststructuralist critics differ from Bhartṛhari, especially in respect of the resolution of meaning, which for him finally is obtained by the authority of the *Vedas* as the decisive power over everything, but for poststructuralists this resolution is endlessly deferred.

Lacan’s analysis itself aims to understand Freud by the juxtaposition of structuralist ideas mainly those of signifier, signified of Saussure and metaphor and metonymy of Jakobson which seem to have been supported in the Freudian propositions. He comprehends Freudian propositions in respect of signification, which Freud expounded in his *Die Traumdeutung*. Lacan considers dream as a kind of writing and says that the functioning of this dream work (*Traumarbeit*) is as per the law of signification through signifiers. He finds many parallels to his poststructuralist postulations in Freudian terminology such as *Entstellung* (distortion or transposition) which indistinctly refer to his “incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier” (170). He further considers other terms too, which significantly correspond to Jakobson’s exposition of metaphor and metonymy like *Verdichtung* (Condensation) and *Verschiebung* (displacement). Lacanian interpretation of Freud’s expositions very clearly shows that there, too, the centre was linguistic structure as the word ‘interpretation’ is inseparably associated with Semantics, a significant branch of linguistics. The title of Freud’s monumental work, “*Die Traumdeutung*” in English “The Interpretation of Dreams” itself is suggestive of its central contention, as the German word “*Traumdeutung*” means “assigning meaning to dreams” which simultaneously in respect of linguistic terminology means that in Freud’s book the semantic goal is to be achieved through the semiological functioning. Many of the German terms in Freudian propositions very clearly anticipate structuralist formulations either in the form of Jakobson’s postulations or in the form of Saussurean opinions as Lacan suggests and proves in his contentions. Lacan recounts those German Freudian terms which unequivocally and in similar contexts have been used by Jakobson leading to the parallel destination in his illustration of metaphor and metonymy. Lacan views construction or for that matter structure of unconscious as language; the similarity is due upon the signification as the existence of both of these lie on the network of signification. He considers unconscious as a product of signification and much in itself a signifying system which actually is true about language also. Lacan in his study aims to show the insistence of the letter in the unconscious where Freud’s *Traumarbeit* (dream-work) is processed; he in this regard is apparently right as the linguistic or even otherwise semiological functioning is not brought to the conscious state of mind, it unconsciously is done, provided all the necessary set of rules are present to encode the message for signification. In his proposition, Lacan considers this ‘unconscious’ as the most important factor behind the signification of signifiers or even otherwise those incoherently formed dream images. Bhartṛhari too, talks about the states of dream and wakefulness in the following *śloka*, where talking about the role/functions of speech/language in the states of *pravibhāga* and *avibhāga* (the

state of wakefulness and the state of dream respectively), he makes it clear that in *pravibhāga*, the *kartā* (subject) functions in connection with the *karma* (object) through speech/language while in *avibhāga*, it is the speech/language that gets expressed in all the forms namely subject, object and the motive as the agent which has a role to play in the state of wakefulness is inactive in the state of dream. Consider the given *śloka*:

*pravibhāge yathā kartā tathā kārye pravartate/
avibhāge tathāsaiva kāryatvenā vibhavatitathā//128// (I: 12)*

Lacan views the functioning of language in the context of psychology, particularly in relation with the states of consciousness and unconsciousness. Lacan here doesn't differ from Bharṭṛhari or Saussure, when says, "What the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious is the whole structure of language". (163), as this 'structure of language' is indistinctly the same as Saussure's 'langue' or further it can also be viewed to have functional similarity with Bharṭṛhari's *sphoma*, which always is considered to be behind all the utterances universally. In Bharṭṛhari's proposition, the structure of language or the system of language which in Saussurean terminology is addressed as 'langue' is located in the unconscious as Bharṭṛhari says, "*tadwacchabdo'pi buddhistha shrutinām kārām pāthak,*" that the structure/system of language located in budhhi distinguishes and decodes a *śabda* to be comprehended; here the *budhhi* referred is actually the 'unconscious mind' of Lacan which brings the set of rules/system of language forward without intimating it to the conscious mind, when required, and the work gets done. Bharṭṛhari also sees the speech as a manifestation of the conscious mind as he says that within and outside a human being this speech exists as his *caitanya* (consciousness).

The structuralist propositions have widely been conceded in Western knowledge system after its emergence, particularly, by those, who some way or the other, have been associated with the structuralist or the poststructuralist movements. And therefore, a proposition, that language precedes any kind of knowledge, awareness or this conscious being as all these emerge after the emergence of language, is universally uncontested. Bharṭṛhari, in the very first *śloka* of his *Vākyapadīyam*, considers language or particularly the basic constituent of language beyond any beginning or the end while in this world all other things are temporal as whatever has been begotten is bound to have its end. It was Bharṭṛhari who proposed that no knowledge was existing before the language, and no knowledge will remain after the language. We have already seen Saussure saying, "There are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language" (112). And thus it can easily be understood that Lacan's proposition in the same context as: "Language and its structure exist prior to the moment at which each subject at a certain point in his mental development makes his entry into it." (163), is undoubtedly an extension to Bharṭṛharian and Saussurean expositions in respect of the same. Lacan, like Bharṭṛhari, considers language all powerful, and like Saussure, concedes it beyond the power of an individual and calls the speaking subject, the person, who makes the utterance as "slave of language", whose place he says is already "inscribed at birth"(163). It is the language that governs

the subject and its world. This view is undoubtedly Bharṭṛharian and Saussurean in approach as both were the believers of the same notion which they concretely observed and then conceptualized their formative opinions in considering the language all powerful, assigning the highest place to it by deeming it to be the creator of the world like almighty.

Lacan's analysis of structure in the poststructuralist discussion is not exactly the same as Saussure's or Derrida's, but it bears the impact of psychology, where he too, like other structuralists and poststructuralists, shows prime concern with the assignment of meaning to the given structure. Lacan doesn't deny the idea of the formation of meaning in a structure or through a structure as he himself has the similar opinion in this regard. He says, "...it is in the chain of signifier that the meaning 'insists' but that none of its elements 'consists' in the signification of which it is at the moment capable" (170). This Lacanian observation is very close to the Bharṭṛharian postulations and Saussurean propositions. Lacan, talking about the chain of signifier, gives appropriate instance to explicate his point, he views this chain as "Rings of a necklace that is a ring in another necklace made of rings" (169). Corresponding to Saussurean proposition, the relation between the different rings of Lacan is that of difference, and these constitutive elements (as these rings constitute a necklace) don't contain value in them individually, as Bharṭṛhari in his *Vākyapadīy* says about the phonemes which constitute a sentence, the end product or a structure with value. Similarly, these small rings are useful for contributing their parts in the constitution of the necklace as meaning moves through them and for a time being it may be seen in the necklace immediately formed, which also is no more than a ring in the formation of a bigger necklace where the value gets shifted from the smaller to bigger necklace. This shift of value/meaning actually is the reality in Lacanian exposition of the idea, where in the structurization of the bigger entity, the smaller unit dissolves its individual self and makes the bigger entity meaningful, and therefore, to Lacan, the reality seems 'impossible', unattainable. It keeps on passing through the small rings to big rings and then to bigger and then further to bigger than the bigger and so on and so forth as here the biggest ring is rarely or hardly constituted. Bharṭṛhari too, presents the similar postulation and calls phonemes, the smaller units, unreal, as the value they contain individually is not real in the context of the bigger structure. For example, the value of a phoneme individually would be unreal in the context of the word constituted of this phoneme in combination with the other phonemes, and similarly the meaning of this word would be unreal, when it combines to form a sentence with other words, and further more, this smaller group of words, or for that matter, a smaller sentence wouldn't be containing real value when it would form the bigger sentence with other constituents of the same kind, which similarly, be extended further. But Bharṭṛhari there differs from Lacan, where this shift of value in creation of the bigger structure resolves at a point, and the structure, required to be comprehended, obtains the contextually true meaning which may also be verified by the authority of the *Vedas*, while for Lacan this shift doesn't stop and the final meaning is unattainable, which is due upon the cessation of the continuum of this move.

For Lacan the identity that one carries or even otherwise the proclamation of ‘I’ is not outside the purview of signification, it also owes its existence to the networks, functioning within the system of language whether as signifier or signified. Lacan views signification as substitution of the actual existence. And this linguistic identity as a process, incessantly, is in the search of unity, wholesomeness, coherence and above all the reality which as per the nature of language are perpetually in the state of deferral or postponement. Lacan has very much been aware of the linguistic reality or construction of reality through language. He, like a true poststructuralist at several occasions, talks about truth and its truthfulness in the circumference of language, his examination of language consists of such inquisitive features which question the very existence of even truth and reality. But also like a structuralist he has full faith over the power of language which in itself sufficiently deals with all the transactions of the world and proffers it its immediate existence which particularly by common human beings is viewed as organized, systematic, coherent and real while the actual constitution of the world is linguistic due upon the codes, where only one reality is immanent that is signification. Now, this signification itself is creative of ‘unreal’ and is a creation of language as Lacan also sees everything within the linguistic sphere, he on truth says, “It is with the appearance of language the dimension of truth emerges” (190). The realm of truth, for Lacan, is actually the word, it is this word from which the truth or lie proceeds. It should further be understood that a word, synonymous with *śabda*, is not only the realm of truth but is realm of all those things, which depend on a word for their existence and here in this world everything depends on word/*śabda* or for that matter language as Bhartṛhari calls it a seed of the entire universe, everything evolves from it (the seed). Consider the following *śloka* for wider understanding:

*ekasya sarvabījasya yasya ceyamanekadhā/
bhokṛḥbhokṭavyarūpe ca bhogarūpeṇa ca sthiti//4// (I: 1)*

He says that it is this *śabda* which expresses itself in all the forms; it has got the manifestation of *bhokṭā* (enjoyer), *bhukta* (enjoyed) and *bhoga* (enjoyment), and in all the states, as per Bhartṛhari who considers it Brahma, the *śabda* Brahma which prevails everywhere, which simultaneously is the cause of reality and illusion in one and the same thing.

Lacan, in his writings which particularly deal with the psycho-linguistic analysis, examines the immanence of letter in the unconscious or for that matter its direct relation with the unconscious. He begins his study with the Freudian contentions and shows there that Freud himself was very much pre-occupied with the linguistic approach, as where so ever the meaning in any form is the centre of inquisition/enquiry, the letter/word indispensably would be present/significant there. Lacan, unequivocally, insists that the conjunction of two images is not a metaphoric creative formation but of two signifiers equally actualized. Here, ‘image’ refers to the actual object, which always is a subjective proposition, relying for its identity on different letters/words, attributed to it in the different contexts, considering it distinct. Lacan, analyzing Freud, explores those entrancing facts, present in Freudian conception, which for an ordinary Psychoanalyst, whose concern is not philological issues will entirely, be irrelevant.

Lacan writes, “So the unnatural images of the boat on the roof; or the man with a comma for a head, which are specifically mentioned by Freud, are examples of dream-images that are to be taken only for their value as signifiers” (176). It should here be understood unambiguously that signifier gains value only after signification, and then accordingly, the signifier attains the magnitude. Suppose this image of “boat on the roof” doesn’t find a suitable elucidation or in other words cannot be attributed some meaning/value, it would cease even to be a signifier as an image attains the status of being a signifier when and only when it signifies some value. Lacan’s preoccupation with the psychoanalytic study of linguistic categories or even otherwise the linguistic study of psychological contents is very concretely actualized in the discursive formation on the resolution of meaning of a signifier, which incessantly forms the series of signification for the given signifier. Lacan, being an exponent of the same tradition, opines invariably the same as Bhartṛhari and Saussure that the creativity is an intrinsic feature of language, which in the world is responsible for the prevailing order, systematization, and above all knowledge. It is also perceived as a form of experience, which basically is a linguistic construct, as in the absence of language distinction between two ideas or two thoughts is impossible, therefore he is of the opinion that in the world, we live in, there is no scope for pre-linguistic experiences to be found, whatever we have as experience is undoubtedly post-linguistic, as comprehension of the existence of a situation is possible only through language. Bhartṛhari and Saussure both considered the experience itself as a form of language structure as in the absence of language there won’t be any distinction between living and non-living beings. This contention can further be seen to have been supported covertly by one of the famous precursors of enlightenment René Descartes, who remarking ‘I think therefore I am’, conceived his very existence, his being, as the result of thinking, in a way he calls himself a ‘thinking being’ whose essence indispensably is due upon the ‘thinking’ which similarly cannot survive in the absence of language, thus the ‘language’ being the cause of thinking is irrevocably the cause of ‘being’ and therefore, is also the cause of this world of beings. Saussure in the absence of language calls the thought as “indistinct masses”, beyond comprehension, unidentifiable lots. Bhartṛhari, long before Lacan, Saussure or even otherwise Descartes said the same thing in his 127th *śloka* of the *Vākyapadīy*. He says if this speech/language is gone, the man would be no more than a piece of wood or stone as with the language the consciousness would also be gone and in its absence difference between living and non-living beings or a man and a piece of wood would be of no meaning. The functioning of this organized and beautiful world indispensably is due upon the language which makes the human race the most intelligent being of the earth.

Thus, we see that Lacan’s analysis of language and the formation of meaning in this system as has been said is very logically founded where he sometimes seems to be structuralist in opinion but in the next moment his approach to the analysis proves him to be a poststructuralist. And these attributes of Lacan can also be seen in common with Bhartṛhari, who, when compared with Derrida and Lacan, is not less poststructuralist in his postulations. Lacan views a situation from two different points of view and

emphasizes on the relevance of context in respect of the formation of meaning for the situation being considered, which evidently, is a poststructuralist approach. To illustrate the idea, Lacan takes an instance of ‘game-strategy’ where winning the game is the only motto and the meaning of success, where for the purpose, deceiving the adversary is the part of the game-strategy but when this success achieved is evaluated on the scale of betrayal, which the adversary faced, who did not practice it for having faith in the game rules, would connote it as an act of inconstancy which for the player who practiced the game-strategy is success. This can better be understood with another simple illustration that one situation can never be viewed similarly as it varies from person to person depending on the context of evaluation. For example, something that is called ‘success’ in the context of winner is viewed contrarily as ‘failure’ in the case of the looser, while this ‘success’ of the winner indispensably depends upon the ‘failure’ of the looser. Both the opponents cannot view the final result of the game as ‘success’, or even otherwise, ‘failure’. The result is viewed distinctly, due upon the distinct context. That is why, to Lacan, the ‘reality’ seems impossible and signification of the given signifier unceasingly takes place. Lacan here differs from both Bharṭṛhari and Saussure, when he views language as open, since in its openness it constantly postpones the resolution of meaning. This deferral of meaning can also be understood by studying his opinion on ‘real’ which can be taken to be synonymous with meaning which he never accurately defines and which seems ‘impossible’ to him. So, it should also be understood that meaning is a reality and if real is impossible, so is meaning, it is always present in its illusive form as it continuously changes, having been affected by the various formative factors.

“...structures reveal an ordering of possible exchanges which, even if unconscious, is inconceivable outside the permutations authorized by language”(164) observes Lacan. This observation is universally acceptable as it can be taken to be the spirit of the principal pronouncements of the most of the theory, having associations with semiology and semantics. Bharṭṛhari long before Lacan, throughout his treatise emphasizes the same idea, which, later on having been postulated as the foremost cogitation of Saussurean linguistics, is followed by the structuralists and the poststructuralists. Nothing, in this world of linguistic phenomena, is possible to be conceived outside the permutational relations allowed by language, for instance, in the word *auspicious* the meaning is conceivable only because the permutation of the phonemes is authorized by the language otherwise the same group of letters or phonemes, but as *cpisouua*, which is not authorized by the language, is unintelligible and consequently non-existent in the system of this language. Similar is the case with a sentence, paragraph, or even otherwise a text, everywhere only authorized permutations make sense and contribute in the further conception.

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