



Synaesthetic Sphota: Reimagining Dali through the Linguistic Vision of Bhartrhari

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Abstract

This article introduces the concept of synesthetic sphota by extending Bhartrhari's theory of sphota—the sudden, holistic emergence of meaning -beyond language into visual art. Drawing on stages of expression (paśyantī, madhyamā, vaikhari) and the intuitive faculty of pratibhā, it argues that images can function as utterances, producing multisensory semantic flashes. Through close analysis of Salvador Dali's "The Elephants" and "Metamorphosis of Narcissus", the study shows how surrealist visuality evokes meaning in ways analogous to linguistic cognition. This framework fuses Indian epistemology with Western aesthetics, offering a new model for reading, hearing, and feeling images.

Keywords: synaesthetic sphota, surrealism, Salvador Dali, pratibha, pasyanti, madhyama, vaikhari, visual signification, Indian aesthetics

1. Introduction

Indian linguistic and philosophical traditions fall back on Bhartrhari's sphota theory as a foundational idea, if not a tenet. Sphota, meaning "bursting forth,"

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refers to the instantaneous and holistic emergence of meaning in language that operates at several levels like the dhvani (the directed articulated sounds which also imply suggestive understanding), nada (gross vibrations/sounds), pasyanti (consciousness where word and meaning are undifferentiated), Madhyama (intellectual stage where words begin to attach themselves to concepts and begin to acquire sequence), vaikhari (the sequential articulated speech according to the will of the speaker), and Pratibha (the instantaneous, non-discursive intuition or insight which helps grasp the sphota) among others. These different levels and stages of language correspond to different senses, experiences, emotions, states of mind, or in other words, they are modes of perception. One must remember that perception is never neutral because the perceiving consciousness is already structured by language, memory, culture, signs, and codes.

The sphota is classified based on the three concepts of individual (vyakti), universal (jati), and indivisibility (akhaṇḍa) together with the three verbal units of phoneme, word, and sentence. It is the sentence-sphota alone among eight types of the sphota which represents the essential nature of the sphota-doctrine. The phoneme-sphota and word-sphota are a grammatical fiction which is helpful to realise the ultimate principle. (Choi 285)

Every act of perception is actually an interpretation as Umberto Eco deftly declares: “The understanding of signs is not a mere matter of recognition (of a stable equivalence); it is a matter of interpretation” (43). Hence, any kind of stimuli or perception or even sensation is always coloured by the consciousness receiving it, and consciousness, according to Bhartrhari, is a linguistic act in essence. The uttered sounds (perceptions/sensations) are manifold and sequenced, but the sphota is grasped as a whole. Meaning does not then lie in individual words or direct sensory data, but in how the mind holistically cognizes or interprets it. So, synaesthesia inevitably inheres in sphota for it to make sense. The researcher uses the term ‘synaesthetic sphota’ in this article to extend the linguistic principle to other conceptual registers. It refers to a dynamic semantic event in which meaning is produced through simultaneous interactions with heterogeneous modes of perception, such as visual, auditory, and tactile, mnemonic experiences, giving rise to an integrated experience of comprehension.

1.2 Literature Review

T.R.V. Murti’s groundbreaking Presidential address to the 37th Session of the Indian Philosophical Congress (1963) in Chandigarh marks a historical moment in Bhartrhari studies, as he was a major twentieth-century Indian thinker who brought Bhartrhari into dialogue with Western metaphysics. He reoriented Bhartrhari studies from the confinement it suffered in Sanskrit grammar and philology towards a comprehensive philosophy. His essay highlights how word and meaning need to be related to an incorruptible unity in order to signify, leading to the understanding that language is not merely phenomenological, but ontological because it is constitutive of being and reality (Murti 145-166). Sound and grammar were no longer

just linguistic or semantic units, but rather an expression of and path to realisation of the all-pervasive Sabdabrahma. However, Bhartrhari was still a niche Indian grammarian, relatively unknown in global academic circles.

Foundational to the accessibility of Bhartrhari to modern critical scholarship is the onus borne by K.A. Subramania Iyer in churning out an intellectually curated and philosophically nuanced translation of the *Brahmakanda* of the *Vakyapadiya* in English (1965). His work not only includes a careful, technically precise rendering of Bhartrhari's own Vritti or commentary, but also corroborates it with extensive commentaries of Helaraja and Punyaraja, medieval commentators on Bhartrhari, thus transforming a simple translation exercise into a coherent philosophical interpretation (Iyer). Iyer's reconstruction of the linguistic philosophy of Bhartrhari became the launchpad for most subsequent critiques on Bhartrhari.

Building on Iyer's exhaustive translations, Harold C. Coward emerged as one of the most influential and rigorous scholars on Bhartrhari in the English speaking world. His books like *Bhartrhari* (1976), *The Sphota Theory of Language* (1980) align Bhartrhari's concepts, hitherto treated in isolation, under the unifying metaphysical principle of the sphota. Articles like "Derrida and Bhartrhari's Vakyapadiya on the Origin of Language" (1990) identify certain similarities between the prodigious philosophers in their understanding of meaning/cognition as arising not from a prior presence but from relationality and primacy of language. His pluck to discuss Bhartrhari alongside poststructuralists like Derrida has invited the more recent undertakings in comparative philosophy like the works of Prabha Shankar Dwivedi who reads Bhartrhari alongside Saussure and Lacan (495-512).

Coward's exclusive attention to sphota as an intuitive framework with a culminating theological teleology overlooks the complexities that the grammarian takes pains to outline. B.K. Matilal in his *The Word and the World* (1980) provides a much-needed intervention away from the hackneyed mystical teleos that Bhartrhari scholarship was disposed, towards an intensive semiotic engagement with sentence meaning, communication, cognition, reality, language play, context, etc. He reads Bhartrhari in tandem with Frege, Russell, Quine and Wittgenstein.

Bhartrhari studies have been traversed and enriched by several contradictory interpretations. It has been extended beyond linguistic to psychoanalysis, textual theory, structuralism, post-structuralism and philosophy. Nevertheless, even though sphota is concerned with the processes of signification, it has been unable to venture into non-linguistic modes of meaning production. Images can also produce meaning, albeit in distinct ways. Visual content offers its own gestures and utterances. Sphota should not only be looked upon as the creative, animated impulse of linguistic meaning production, but as a semantic mechanism for any signifying system, be it linguistic, auditory, visual or tactile.

1.4. Objectives

Keeping this aspect (that sphota consists of different modes of perception) of the sphota in mind, this paper attempts to extrapolate the idea of sphota beyond

the confines of language (in the conventional sense of the spoken and written language structures) and apply it to visual art by introducing the concept of “synaesthetic sphota” and understanding how “Pratibha” functions in order to contribute to this synaesthetic sphota model of reading, hearing, and feeling images. In this scheme, visual perception transcends mere optics to evoke a complete multisensory and semantic insight, akin to how sphota signifies. The paper seeks to do this by analysing the surrealist painter, Salvador Dali’s paintings, particularly *The Elephants* and the *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, as verbal utterances that evoke a multisensory semantic flash. This synthesis opens up a new theoretical horizon for aesthetics, fusing Indian linguistic metaphysics with Western poetics.

1.5. Methodology

This interdisciplinary study employs a qualitative and interpretative research methodology assimilating comparative aesthetics, semiotic interpretation and textual analysis within its ambit. The theoretical framework weaves Bhartrhari’s linguistic theory of sphota into the theories of synaesthesia and surrealist aesthetics. Selected paintings by Salvador Dali will be reviewed to understand how these surrealist semiotic signs can generate a multimodal moment of holistic apprehension akin to the instantaneous generative experiential event of the sphota.

1.6. Bhartrhari’s Sphota and its stages:

Sphota is a complex concept to define. It has been explained variously in the *Vakyapadiya*.

a) For Bhartrhari, the sentence when taken as an indivisible meaning-unit is the sphota. Sphota is often synonymous with sabda and Brahman. It is an idea, a meaning-whole, which is inherently given and which begets and inheres in all meaning. It is eternal and enduring, only the external manifestations have variations. It is the undifferentiated Word-Principle which is beyond existence and non-existence, has no sequence, but appears to have it in order to induce practical worldly usage. It is both the cause and the effect.

b) Sphota is an a priori entity but is paradoxically revealed as a process. When one hears or learns a word for the first time, the meaning might not be effectively cognized. There might be a vague, veiled conception which is erroneous and incomplete. Having failed to grasp the whole sphota, one asks for repetitions. These repetitions serve to generate a progressively clearer cognition of the whole sphota which is suddenly finally grasped in a flash of intuition. This leads us to the next aspect of sphota – it is indescribable but intelligible as perception and suggestion.

c) Harold G. Coward, in his book *Bhartrhari*, mentions an analogy which Bhartrhari uses to explain the sphota as perception, rather than inference or convention: “When an expert jeweler finally sees the genuineness of a precious stone after a continuous gaze at it consisting of a series of comparatively vague cognitions of it, it is a case of perception” (37). With inference and convention, either knowledge is procured or not revealed at all. There is a sense of immediacy

functioning, while perception is not immediate and not dismissible. It gradually qualifies from ambiguity to clarity.

d) Sphota is unitary and objective but it does allow for subjectivity because it is that substratum or matrix which contains all potentialities of multiplicity and complexity.

e) Sphota is the very basis of language and linguistic expressibility so it might be described as linguistic potency.

The sphota unfolds through various stages of vak and its expressive modalities. At its most subtle level lies pasyanti, which is a pre-differentiated whole nurturing the seeds of differentiation and sequence in its womb. At this level, sound, form and meaning are fused intuitively, albeit with the directed potential to diversify. This raw unified vision gradually takes on a structured garb, still working on an inner, mental level, where differentiation into conceptual forms commences. This is the madhyama stage. Finally, in vaikhari, speech manifests outwardly through sound, syllables, and words. Alongside these three vital stages of vak, there are the pratibha (a spontaneous flash of intuition that discloses meaning), dhvani (a suggestive resonance of meaning beyond literal denotation), nada (the palpable sound vibrations running through articulated phonemes), rasa (bliss), and others which facilitate the revelation of the sphota. These are not separate entities, rather they may be thought of as interconnected modalities through which the sphota, as the unitary Word-principle (sabdabrahman), reveals itself moving from an undifferentiated field of signification towards a definite, more pronounced, differentiated expression.

Adaptive learning systems focus on improving the performance of educational processes by adapting them to different students. One of the factors which require this adaptation is the preferred way of students to learn, which is at times considered as a blend of visual, auditory, kinesthetic, (VAK) etc. Knowing such things, not only helps the teacher to improve the delivery of the content, but also assists in improving assessment methods to suit each student (Sayed et al. 2).

1.7. How to think the sphota beyond speech?

In order to think of sphota beyond linguistic constraints, it is imperative to think of it as a semantic unit subsuming any kind of text or utterance. To be able to apply the sphota theory to images, music, performances, etc, is to have a nuanced understanding of the sphota as a multi-modal dimension of communication or discourse. It must be borne in mind that a text or an utterance does not merely refer to spoken language, it refers to any sign, across media, which demands signification. Consequently, it is perhaps inevitable to turn towards a post-structural interpretation of the text as an animated experience of language. Roland Barthes in his "From Work to Text" defines the text as a "methodological field" which "is experienced only in an activity of production" (157). In other words, a text is something which is not only plural, infinitely produced with infinite references and deferrals, it is also something that is breathed into existence as a result of

continuous interaction of meanings. A text, is therefore, any event that calls for the generation of meaning. It is this aspect of the text that may be grafted on to the sphota to refigure it as a semantic burst of meaning surpassing linguistic attributions. In the light of the understanding of sphota as discussed above, it is necessary to reckon with the term as Bhartrhari comprehends it to cognize how creation or meaning advances from it.

In Bhartrhari's scheme of linguistic theory, sphota is interchangeably termed as the sabdabrahman. Being an exponent of the Sabdavaiva school of thought, Bhartrhari espouses the view that cognition and language are ultimately ontologically identical concepts. The Indian philosophical thought conceives of language as speech/speaking, and 'vak' is the faculty of speech which implies not only external uttered words but also internal thoughts which precede and follow utterances/sounds. 'Vak' or language is pregnant with meaning which is concealed at first but bursts forth into manifestation with the help of uttered sounds. Hence, there is no cognition without language as Bhartrhari says in his *Vakyapadiya*, "There is no cognition in the world in which the word does not figure. All knowledge is, as it were, intertwined with the word" (1:123).

There is no differentiation between them. Thought and word, spoken-word and meaning develop simultaneously. The ancient Brahmanical view asserts that speech and Brahman, the Veda and Brahman are one. Speech is the creation of the gods and permeates all creation. The 'sabda,' Bhartrhari asserts, is Brahman (the ultimate, changeless, formless, origin-less reality): "The Brahman who is without beginning or end, whose very essence is the Word, who is the cause of manifested phonemes, who appears as the objects, from whom the creation of the world proceeds" (1:1).

The creation of the world or reality proceeds through the sabda, which should be comprehended in two distinct but symbiotic ways. The "sabdabrahman" is the Supreme Reality or Eternal Verbum/Supreme Word. It is the underlying *creative principle* that prevails beyond space and time. It has no beginning and end; hence it has no sequence. Yet, it does contain some diversity or sequence when it takes the form of its manifestations or utterances (both speech and other forms of utterances like: music, paintings, sculptures, poetry, symbols, architecture, etc. - anything that conveys and necessitates meaning/signification is a text, an utterance). The sabdabrahman is One and Many simultaneously because as the undivided eternal principle it flows through all its manifestations. The sphota is reliant on this aspect of the sabdabrahman as the *universal* semantic imbuer, to make itself realizable by the speaker and listener or the creator and the spectator. The sabdabrahman is beyond all representations and is suffused with all powers which are neither identical to it nor different from it. It is both the cause and effect from whose interaction creation occurs, evolves and sustains itself. The Brahman is the Self, constructed by the word/language, it is that all-embracing phenomenon that is both and beyond differentiation and unity, existence and non-existence, sequence and absence of it, truths and falsehoods, and yet shines as distinct from everything. This paradox that the sabdabrahman is endowed with is explained by Bhartrhari in his *Vritti*:

The transformations, that is, the Universe proceeds out of the Brahman which is the Word, devoid of all inner sequence; from that involution (samvarta) in which all diversity has merged and is undifferentiated and is inexpressible, all transformations being in a latent stage. (2)

It is a unity in which all diversity remains suspended latently, it is an undifferentiated whole of potential differentiations, and it is that sphota, the sudden burst of understanding, that encloses the multiplicities like the yolk of a pea-hen (51), yet is anchored by something universal which is why it can convey meaning. The sabda is that consciousness, that self-luminous principle which reveals objects/the world and itself. Ontologically similar, the sphota reveals itself (as linguistic unity/form) and the meaning simultaneously.

The second way in which creation proceeds from sabda/sphota is how any thought that passes our mind requires a corresponding articulate verbal form or at least some kind of expression or utterance. Even a non-existent fact is recognised as fiction but can be apprehended in thought, that is, become existent, simply by virtue of having been articulated. Gaurinath Sastri, in his *Philosophy of Word and Meaning*, adroitly discerns how reality is engendered from the understanding and articulation of the sabda/sphota. It is the potency and expressibility of language that unravels the world as we know it:

A reality which is not associated with an articulate verbal form cannot be the content of our thought and is regarded as a fiction, when the existence of an object is denied by our perceptual cognition or inferential knowledge, the mere use of an articulate verbal form appears to confer an existential status upon it and makes it a fit object of communication. (5)

It is interesting to note that not only is our external consciousness of things determined by language, but also the internal consciousness (cognitive experiences, emotions, feelings, ideas) is hardly intelligible if divorced from corresponding linguistic forms. Hence words or language/signifying systems are the basis of creation and the epistemology of being. The sabda/sphota, then, is both the underlying universal Word principle as well as the articulate linguistic forms/images that make reality feasible and comprehensible. One can already begin to perceive that though the sphota depends on the thought-language dialectic to ultimately ground signification, it is not confined to the spoken word alone. It is also that inter-sensory, inter-modal substratum that is actually concerned with the signification process of any kind of articulation/utterance/text given to thought. This signification does not necessarily have to advance from speech; it can proceed from any signifying system because the sphota is essentially a binding meaning-whole oblivious of the modes of meaning representation. It is like a pre-differentiated field of meaning, where the auditory, visual, and intellectual converge.

2. Towards a Synaesthetic Sphota

Gaurinath Sastri anticipates the synaesthetic predilection of sphota when he remarks that, "The fact that logos stands for an idea as well as a word wonderfully

approximates to the concept of sphota” (103). Sphota itself is already a synaesthetic concept since it is the fusion of both sound and meaning, word and idea, the auditory and the cognitive. The sphota is really an instantaneous combination of the word-sound (dhvani) and the word-meaning (artha). It is a transcendent ground in which the spoken syllables and the conveyed meaning are merged. The immediate flash of meaning that dawns on the listener or observer is also a process through which it has to travel in order to properly signify. The various facets that set this process into action as well as guide one’s understanding towards its final realization go on to unveil the synaesthetic elements of sphota, since each of these facets corresponds to a particular sense or a fusion of senses that synaesthesia operates on.

2.1. The Threefold Vak

Sphota might be an undivided whole but it is not a unilateral concept. It consists of several levels of cognition and perception which lead up to the instantaneous flash of meaning conception. Bhartrhari outlines three levels of the Vak (Speech) namely, the Pasyanti, the Madhyama, and the Vaikhari. The sphota or the undivided whole can only be progressively manifested after engaging with these three levels of speech. Bhartrhari says of the Pasyanti:

The Seeing One is that in which sequence is merged and though it is One, the power to produce sequence has entered into it. It is restless and also still in concentration, hidden and pure, the forms of the objects of knowledge have entered into it or it has no form at all; it has the appearance of limited objects or of connected objects or the appearance of all objects has come to an end in it; thus it has infinite variety. (Vritti 142)

2.1.1. Pasyānti

In other words, Pasyanti has to be interpreted in terms of the infinite where affirmation, negation and transcendence coalesce. It is the locus of various objects in their manifold forms, the seat where all objects are merged beyond recognition, and again the core which transcends all objects that it does not manifest them at all. It is a non-sequential unity, but also contains latent sequence which translates into the madhyama and vaikhari. It is beyond time but is capable of producing temporality. It can manifest as particular sound, word, concept, it can also manifest as relations/connections, sentences, structured discourse, yet it can dissociate from all particularities, transcending them to return to a state of pure undifferentiated unity. It is that inner visionary (seeing energy/Darsana) or intuitive pre-conceptual level of language where sound, word and meaning are undivided yet capacitated by a restless potential to diversify into forms, objects, meanings. Synaesthetically it might be seen as a fused nucleus of auditory, visual, cognitive faculties before they separate into discrete channels.

To better grasp the concept and implications of the pasyanti, it might be helpful to bring it in dialogue with a similar notion of semiotic chora as advocated

by Julia Kristeva. It is not too far a stretch to consider both concepts as consonant with each other, since they argue for pre-discursive grounds of meaning. The semiotic chora posits how meaning precedes language as structured discourse. For Kristeva, the semiotic and the symbolic are two complementary modalities of the signifying process that constitutes language. She uses the term “chora” to denote:

an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases. We differentiate this uncertain and indeterminate articulation from a disposition that already depends on representation . . . Although our theoretical description of the chora is itself part of the discourse of representation that offers it as evidence, the chora, as rupture and articulations (rhythm), precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality, and temporality. Our discourse – all discourse – moves with and against the chora in the sense that it simultaneously depends upon and refuses it. Although chora can be designated and regulated, it can never be definitively posited: as a result, one can situate the chora and, if necessary, lend it a topology, but one can never give it axiomatic form. (26)

The semiotic chora may be ideated as a fluid pre-linguistic, pre-conceptual realm of drives, gestures, affect and non-verbal inter-subjective expression and communication associated with the maternal body before the establishment of the self and other distinctions in the symbolic realm of language, logic, fixed identities. It is a dynamic, chaotic space, like the ‘restless’ pasyanti. It encompasses all primal pulsations, energies, emotional states characterized by rhythm and attachment, but lacking fixed meaning. It is a precondition for later language acquisition and identity formation. Like the formless undifferentiated pasyanti, this fluid chora is the underlying non-expressive totality of drives and like the pasyanti gives rise to madhyama and vaikhari, the chora, though not yet ordered by syntax or semantics, begets them.

2.1.2. Madhyamā

Of the Madhyama, Sastri explains, “When pasyanti feels that it would express the world of ideas and objects, there arises a wave of sequence on its calm and tranquil surface, and what has been so long lying as one and indivisible unfolds a sequence which is traceable in Madhyama” (73). The Madhyama is an intermediate stage between indistinct (pasyanti) and distinct manifestation (vaikhari). If in the pasyanti the denote and the denotation are inseparable and unrecognizable, in the madhyama the difference between the two gets slightly manifested. It is a kind of mental visualization of meaning or an imaginal auditory interface where you can internally have a sense of the sound and meaning about to be articulated overtly in the vaikhari.

2.1.3. Vaikhari

The vaikhari is embedded in the aural and tactile domains. It is the final articulated speech or utterance/text that is available for meaning to be understood.

It is attributed by sequence and distinction such that it is apprehended by an external auditory organ. While articulation requires participation of the tongue, breath, lips, palate to create palpable vibrations, the vaikhari can hence be thought of as a tactile manifestation besides being an auditory one.

2.2. How Pratibha lends itself to Synaesthetic Sphota:

The pratibha is that faculty through which the indivisible meaning-whole of the sphota is apprehended. For Bhartrhari, the basic unit of meaning is the sentence, therefore, the vakyasphota assumes priority in his ordering of linguistic signification. The sentence is really a psychic entity, a mental symbol which itself is the meaning. Pratibha is also a unified psychic entity similar to the vakyasphota. It perceives the meaning of the sentence (vakyasphota) in a flash of intuition. It is the natural, spontaneous apprehension/ability which makes communication possible. Bhartrhari maintains that when a word is uttered, it is not by inference, rather by the speaker's context, intentions, tone, etc that meaning is bestowed on it. This completeness of the sentence-meaning is experienced, not through inference, but in the special kind of perception called pratibha. Pratibha is not logical in nature, so it is incapable of being directly described. It cannot be understood by appealing to the phenomenal facts of ordinary perception. It transcends phenomenal characteristics such as name and form. It is a lived flash of insight. In attempting to describe pratibha, one can do no more than evoke in the other those conditions which will allow the vakyasphota to be revealed in the listener's own pratibha experience. Pratibha is that which makes present meaning.

It is an innate, intuitive, creative flash that enables one to understand and produce meaningful speech and thought. It functions as a pre-conceptual cognitive power preceding formal language, that grasps the sphota. It may be described as the inner readiness to receive language meaningfully. It explains how we know language and meaning without step-by-step training or reasoning.

When attempting to position Language-Ideologies research within the framework of Applied Linguistics and related scientific sub-disciplines and approaches, it becomes evident that significant overlaps with research fields such as Language Attitudes, Folk Linguistics and Language Awareness exist. The question arises as to whether the differences are more closely related to various scientific subcommunities than to the phenomena under investigation. Similarities may go unnoticed either because researchers do not sufficiently engage with related approaches, or differences relating to content and methodology are overly emphasised for reasons of disciplinary demarcation. This article is based on a very broad concept of Language Awareness, which has evolved beyond its traditional context of language teaching and learning (Stegu 14).

Bhartrhari talks about how even corrupt words sometimes convey the correct or intended meaning. It is not discursive or rational, but affective, spontaneous. It generates meaning through non-linear interpretation via a totalizing perception. Hence, it is multisensory or synaesthetic in essence. It becomes the central epistemic

organ that fuses disparate sensory inputs into a unified, intuitive grasping of meaning. The pratibha acts as an inner prism through which all symbolic forms, images, sounds, textures, voices are refracted into one cohesive semantic flash. It is no longer bound to vak or spoken utterance, it goes beyond the verbal to include visual, somatic, cognitive and emotional grammars. The primary function of the pratibha is to reveal the sphota clearly to the listener/observer. In other words a verbal sign is only attributed a signified or translated with clarity through an appropriate awakening of the pratibha. In this the pratibha aligns with its modern cousin, Roman Jakobson's concept of "intersemiotic translation." Writing about the signification process of a linguistic sign, Jakobson, in his essay "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," says, "For us, both as linguists and ordinary word-users, the meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign, especially a sign "in which it is more fully developed", and he further elaborates that intersemiotic translation "or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems" (232-233). It must be carefully noted that here 'translation' does not merely refer to a language being converted into other target languages, it refers to the more profound sense of becoming meaning. Hence, pratibha may be relevantly linked to this meaning making aspect of Jakobson's idea of translation. Intersemiotic translation refers to interpreting verbal signs into non-verbal language in search of new meanings and perspectives, for example, a poem being transmuted into a painting, a sculpture, music or story. It is capable of converting image to concept, sound to symbol, and so on for a clarified vision of that which is to be conveyed. Hence, it shows that meaning is not confined to verbal language, but can travel across sense-modalities and expressions. What is important in this cross reference is to understand pratibha as an intersemiotic translator in that the listener's pratibha collects the sound and disperses it into images, concepts, visualizations in the mind of the reader so that there is an instant burst of semantic comprehension.

3. Analysis: Salvador Dali's *The Elephants and Metamorphosis of Narcissus* as Synaesthetic Sphota

According to Bhartrhari all knowledge or cognition is intertwined with the word, and from the extensive deliberation above it is clear that the word is more than the spoken aspect. The word stands for any kind of utterance or text or signifying systems which convey and demands signification. Hence, Dali's paintings act as imagistic utterances in which tactile, visual, auditory, and cognitive elements fuse together to render a sudden flash of semantic insight. The paintings resemble the pre-verbal, non-rational pratibha that precedes or moves beyond formal discursive language yet orchestrates a cognitive fusion of sense modalities into one cohesive flash of insight. Surrealism prided itself on the dream state, the irrational, fears, emotions, the unconscious, like pratibha, it is capable of sustaining pre-verbal, even extra-verbal recognition, mythic memory retrieval, and symbolic transformation of reality - all of which lead to some kind of spontaneous epiphanic knowledge, cognition, or meaning production.

3.1. The Elephants (1948)



Fig. 1. Salvador Dalí, *The Elephants*, 1948

This striking iconoclastic painting consists of two elephants confronting each other. Elephants are conventionally perceived as gigantic beasts with tremendous strength. This perception is immediately contrasted in the painting by granting them spindly, frail legs that could collapse at any moment under their weight. If one looks closely, the elephants do not seem to have a healthy body, their bones and ribs and joints are visible. They appear almost spectral like just as the two spectral humans below. It almost seems as though the carcasses of the elephants are propped up on stilts. The bodies of the beasts seem to be disintegrating and crumbling into dust which is still on its way to the ground and is somehow incredibly suspended in mid-air. Dalí subverts and distorts these traditional symbols of power, strength, wisdom, memory, and eternity in order to jolt the viewer from a smug stupor of apathy and passivity. Above the backs of the elephants are two obelisks which were ancient relics of worship, knowledge and harmony. They have been historically known to symbolize the penetrating rays of the sun and the sun's journey thereby becoming a representation of stability, regeneration and creation. This, too, is called into question by Dalí because the obelisks are poised without any support thus, destabilizing the idea of stability that they maintain. The landscape is barren and deserted except for a temple-like structure and two human figures. The scale of the

elephants makes the humans appear dwarfish. One approaches the other with an extended hand while the other seems to be some sort of a prophet dancing in divine rapture and probably playing a tambourine like instrument signifying celebration, victory, joy. However, the obscurity and size of the prophet downplay any sense of joy, spiritual rejuvenation or bliss that it may have suggested. The fact that the other figure reaches out but is yet to realize a communion with spiritual truth reveals as bleak a picture of the human condition as the parched desolate landscape behind. The color palette too symbolically conjures up the time of the setting sun and by extension, dwindling hope of any kind of constancy in a modern world ravaged by sterility, disillusionment, fragmentation, uncertainty and alienation. The painting seems to herald a cataclysmic event, with a looming shadow of war and the aggressive mien of the elephants, portraying perhaps a daring shift in how one should perceive the world and human experience. It offers a fresh lens to re-examine reality.

The painting is obviously a visual register where most information is garnered by sight. However, there are plenty of synaesthetic elements in this nightmarish dream-like painting that contribute to a holistic semantic insight generated across sense modalities. The arid wasteland given to sight emanates a piercing silence that resonates with the theme of spiritual emptiness and alienation an individual must feel in a reality perturbed by inner fragmented complexities/identities and an equally unstable external realm. Through this deafening tortured silence, one can perhaps also hear the strained creaking of the insect-like limbs of the elephants moving towards each other. The minimized size of the ecstatic prophet drowns out the possible sound of divine beatitude and union in the wake of the central dominating cataclysmic event. The fragility, the silence, the tension and imbalance are palpable through the various vignettes of this painting. The sight of the elongated spindly legs animates one's hearing to almost hear the trembling of the legs giving way under the tremendous pressure of the huge bodies. The obelisks are rigid monolithic structures. Given Dali's predisposition towards the portrayal of the unconscious and instinctual drives and desires, these obelisks may be seen as recurrent phallic symbols present in many of his paintings. They become a sign of masculine potency and dominance. It is interesting that the suspension of the obelisks renders them simultaneously overpowering and vulnerable, thereby questioning the authority of the phallus, of symbolic order, of ideology and discourse perhaps (they rest on a master-signifier - the phallus- that centralizes meaning, structure and hierarchy). An image of the obelisk is transformed into a synaesthetic event where sexuality, dominance, fragility, power and irony burst forth instantaneously. The painting, like the Pratibha is not logical or linear but signifies like the Pratibha through synaesthetic sphota. The individual elements of the painting may make some sense but the innate ability of the viewer makes him/her perceive it as a synaesthetic epiphanic burst of meaning, just as the vakyasphota is perceived in relation to all its individual elements. The Pratibha allows the viewer to grasp the meaning of the image synaesthetically - the viewer

can feel the precarious tension of the massive forms teetering on fragile limbs, can hear the anguished silence and the hushed sounds, can feel the weightless burden and impotency of the once monumental icons of strength. The sphotic moment emerges when the image transcends absurdity and begins to articulate the instability of power and of truth, the dreamlike inversion of gravity contrasting temporality and eternity, and the echo of historical memory. The executed image is the vaikhari and the viewer has to experience this utterance and understand its import through his/her experience of the Pratibha that intuits the meaning travelling across multiple sense modalities in an instant of semantic insight.

3.2. Metamorphosis of Narcissus (1937)



Fig.2. Salvador Dali, Metamorphosis of Narcissus, 1937

The next painting by Dali which will be analyzed is this imposing and intriguing painting called *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, based on the myth of Narcissus. The Greek myth recounts the story of a strikingly handsome youth, Narcissus, who rejected the love of the nymph Echo who could only repeat his last words and eventually withered away in grief. The goddess Nemesis punished the arrogance and cruelty of Narcissus by cursing him to fall in love with his own reflection. Having gone to a nearby source of water to quench his thirst, he looked at his reflection and fell in love with himself. So absorbed was he by himself and overcome by the unrequited love for his own image, Narcissus pined, wasted away and died, and from that very forsaken spot bloomed a narcissus flower. It is this moment of

Narcissus' transformation into the flower that Dali captures in his painting.

Dali uses the mirror technique or the technique of the double in many of his paintings as he does here. Surrealism relishes disrupting reality, hence doubling creates a reality that is both real and unreal, credible yet a phantasmagorical reality. By staging doubles, Dali invites the viewer into a liminal space – between perception and hallucination, the self and the other, the known and the unknown. This also resonates with the psychoanalytical idea of the uncanny by which Dali was highly influenced. In the uncanny, the familiar (the self) becomes strange when doubled. Mirrors represent a paradoxical reality – recognition and alienation- which both psychoanalysis and surrealism harness. It reveals a split in subjectivity so much so that the other in the mirror might come across as threatening. The “I” or the self is not self-grounded, but formed in the gaze of the Other. The illusion of wholeness or stability is based on a fracture of the self. The mirror promises identity but also exposes its fragility. The mirror-image in Narcissus is hence fatal – he mistakes the reflection (other) for the self thus collapsing from self-recognition into annihilation. The painting, at a glance, looks like a mirror image, but if one looks closely, the metamorphosis is clearly visible.

On one side is Narcissus seemingly anonymous and made of boulders with no distinct facial features other than a seated human form. On the other side is a hand sprouting from a soil, holding a cracked egg from which blooms the narcissus flower. The hand is placed in a manner in which it forms a reflection of Narcissus, but is in fact the exact opposite. While the Narcissus figure forms an enclosed circle of conceit, the outward open gesture of the hand suggests a breaking free from that cycle of confinement into a transformative energy to create. The egg is a universal symbol of fertility, virility and creation. It is a cosmic symbol of beginnings in many religions. For Dali, the egg represents the mystery of life enclosed within fragility. The stone hand, as if petrified by death, yields the egg – a fascinating antithesis of destruction birthing creation. The hand is covered with tiny ants, which in Dali's paintings, are a symbol of death and decay. It is a gruesome memory of childhood (Dali saw a dead bat being devoured by ants when he was a child) that survives and becomes a profound motif in his works. From the cold lifeless stone, from the decaying body of Narcissus emerges the hope of renewal and resurrection. It is almost as if death and annihilation is a necessary precondition for transformation and life. In the right-hand corner of the painting there seems to be an animal gnawing at raw flesh – again drawing one back to the carnal cycle of life, death and mortality. The backgrounds of the two figures complement the corresponding forms. The one which contains the stony lifeless Narcissus is bounded by barren crags and dark cloudy smoke with just a hint of the sky visible. This reflects the theme of impotence suggested by the self-absorbed youth. The other side containing the germinating hand poised with an egg, has a background where the sky is more visible and there are clouds ready to shower down life-imbuing rain thus, echoing the incipient existence coming into being. The background also contains a chessboard which is quite bizarre in a painting that invokes themes of mortality,

temporality, and transformation. The chessboard may be said to represent discourse, law, order, logic while the animated little human figures seem as though they dread stepping into a society that exacts conforming rather than being deviant. The irrational drives, the unconscious, the divided identities, the fears, the instincts – all of which also construct the subject – are suppressed in order to comply with the male phallogocentric order established by the chessboard. The scrambling figures may be the pawns that symbolize the beginning of the game – minor, humble pieces whose destiny unfolds only once the game begins. Similarly, the animated figures on the margins are not yet inscribed into the central drama (the mirrored Narcissus, the egg, the hand). They hover at the threshold of becoming, but at what price? Pawns are traditionally expendable. In mythic terms, these shadowy figures may embody the inevitable human sacrifice that feeds the cycle of metamorphosis, death, and rebirth. They are just like Narcissus, punished for giving into a primeval eros, awaiting his death and resurrection.

The painting evokes more than just visual recognition – it demands a tactile, auditory, even temporal immersion. The cracking of the egg can be heard amid the silence imposed by Narcissus' tragic death and the cries of perhaps the animated pawns. The hardness of the stone conveys rigidity and the delicate feel of the flower conveys freshness, life and renewal. The beast tearing into flesh is a shocking tactile image of disgust. The cool water, the mirror of Narcissus, suggests both desires to surrender to its calmness but also a resistance from its abyss-like depth. The crackling of the egg, the silence of transformation, the cacophony of the animated figures in the background, the echo of myth all converge in a sphotic burst. The painting transforms into a kind of visual incantation that unfolds across sensory registers and culminates in mythic insight.

Conclusion

Bhartrhari's sphota theory liberates meaning from formalism/structure. Meaning arises not from syllables, grammar, correctness, but from a sudden unified flash of cognition – one that imagination, or pratibha, channels. When applied to surrealist visuality, such as Dalí's irrational forms, the viewer experiences not confusion but synaesthetic sphota: a semantic burst across senses, liberated from structural rules, yet profoundly resonant and meaningful. This fusion of Indian and Western thought offers a model where art is not shown, but revealed, where seeing becomes a kind of listening, and the image becomes a silent utterance of meaning.

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