

**CRITIQUING DEREK WALCOTT'S LANDSCAPE OF SOUNDS, WILD ECHOES
AND CULTURAL FORM 'CALYPSO' WITH THE PERSPECTIVE OF
BHARTRHARI'S THEORY OF SPHOTA**

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ABSTRACT: *This paper attempts to explore and deconstruct Derek Walcott's cultural form, Calypso in the light of Bhartrhari's theory of Varna-sphota and Vakya-sphota. The doctrine of sphota predominantly belonged to Bhartrhari which developed threefold doctrine of sphota related to letters or phonemes, words and sentences. Walcott's experimentation in poetry led him to discover calypso. The Calypso is an integral part of carnival celebrations in Trinidad. The people of Trinidad have preserved the major types of traditional songs functionally associated with the lives of folk at work, at play, at worship and even in revolt. It "belongs to the borderline sphere between art and life". It uses a comic verbal tone consisting of a variety of sounds and words. Calypso exhibits these features of mixing high and low vocabulary. Walcott uses Calypso, a dramatic monologue in rhymed couplets, in words, phrases, syntax and structure to subvert the hierarchy which undervalues Creole. Bhartrhari's doctrine of sphota has been applied to deconstruct Walcott's creation of sounds, words and experimentation with fusion of sounds in his poems, which don't only refer to linguistic units but serve as conveyor of meaning also. 'The Spoiler's Return' uses all above mentioned morphological and semantic characteristics of Calypso. Walcott imparts meaning and dimension to cultural forms and tradition. genres and styles, both the official and the vernacular. It further extends Bhartrhari's concept of 'upadana sabda' ie linguistic sound to analyse Walcott's calypso in manifestation of the sound and its application in conveying the meaning. Bhartrhari's interpretation of the concept of meaning and linguistics, as evidenced from upadana sabda, sphota and nada, and their sequential synchronization to produce sound and meaning have been applied to explain the phenomenon of sounds and their relation with the universe in Walcott's poetry. Bhartrhari's definition of sphota takes word or sentence as indivisible meaning-unit. Sometimes it functions as a symbol or linguistic unit. V.S. Apte defines sphota as "breaking forth or disclosure and the idea that bursts out or flashes on the mind when a sound is uttered" (Harold G. Coward, Bhartrhari, 35). Bhartrhari employs sabda /sphota, dhvani and nada as three independent but inter-related units for conveying meaning. To him sabda/sphota implies the inner unity that conveys the meaning. Dhavnis are all-pervasive, imperceptible particles which, when accompanied by the movement of vocal organs become perceptible sounds called nada. These nadas are suggestive of the word, sphota or sabda. One can understand Bhartrhari's notion of sphota when it is applied to poetry. In these lines of Walcott's poem titled "Omeros", the expression of speech pattern provides creol etymology, which implies the inner unity of sphota and further gets transformed into dhavnis.*

KEYWORDS: Landscape of Sounds, Wild Echoes, Calypso, Theory of Sphota.

"O was the conch-shell's invocation, mer was
both mother and sea in our Antillean patois,
as, a grey bone, and the white surfs its crashes
and spreads its sibilant collar on a lace shore

.Omeros was the crunch of dry leaves, and the wash
that echoes from a cave-mouth when the tide has ebbed.”(Walcott, 191)

In this verse Walcott composes a variety of word-images that, when uttered, manifest in listener’s consciousness an intuitive perception of sea. The oceanic terms and landscapes create **nada**, integrating word/**sphota** with **dhavni** which the poet has attempted to produce in the minds of the readers. Each of the images used here evoke **sphota** of sea and its splendour. In “Omeros” every thing changes into sea, be it land or human beings or forest. Walcott achieves this magical transformation by integrating the word-images with their internal unity of meaning. This can be explained by Bhartrhari’s **sphota** and his analysis of words. These words of his poem “*Sea Grapes*” can be analysed in terms of speech rhythms as reflected in Bhartrhari’s notion of **nadas**:

“O so you is Walcott?
You is Robby brother?
Teacher Alix son? (Walcott, 193)

Here Walcott’s speech rhythms signify the notion of language as conventional or utilitarian. Bhartrhari suggests two ways in which **sphota** manifests causal energy of speech. First, in bursting forth of pent-up possibility of the word itself and secondly, the desire of the speaker to communicate. Bhartrhari finds language to contain and reveal its own telos. Here individual word doesn’t signify the meaning but the sentence. To quote Harold G. Coward “Bhartrhari observes that man doesn’t speak in individual words. For him the chief reality is the linguistic communication, is the idea or meaning whole of the indivisible sentence. Although he sometimes speaks about letters (varna) or individual words (pada) as meaning bearing linguistic units (sphota), it is clear that for Bhartrhari the true form of the **sphota**, is the sentence (Harold, 39). “Omeros” is Walcott’s experimentation with Calypso both in form and content. The rhythmic undertone of the poem conveys the meaning by simulating sounds (**dhavni**) which are successively transformed into **nadas** with utterance of the readers. The utterance of its name ‘Omeros’ is linked to the sounds of nature like the ‘crunch’ of the dry leaves. The detailed descriptions of various aspects of nature have been conveyed by breaking the word into its constituents to signify natural manifestations and thus closer to Bhartrhari’s theory of **sphota**, **dhavni** and **nada** as expounded in *Vakyapadiya*. In “Omeros” the invocation contained in the sound ‘O’ has been distributed among other **vakyapadas**, to suggest the **dhavni** as in the ‘grey bone’ and ‘crashing of the surf on the shore’, is onomatopoeically reproduced in the utterance of Omeros. The other innovative experimentation with sounds can be noticed in reoccurrence of many sounds in end-words with ‘s’ sound which reproduces the sound of the sea within the structure.

To Bhartrhari inference and reasoning applied to words of a sentence brings an individual to a level of consciousness where intuitive grasping (**pratibha**) of the meaning-whole (**vakya-sphota**) becomes possible. Kapil Kapoor explicitly says that “Bhartrhari begins by saying that meaning belongs to the word (Vakyapadiya 2.53). The names ‘word’ and ‘sentence’ are applied to *sequence* of individual sounds and individual words, meaning arises from the whole sequence, and individual sounds are devoid of meaning. It is arrangement and not the *unit* that has a meaning (Vakyapadiya 2.53.54). This applies to all levels- the meaning belongs to the structure” (Kapil Kapoor, *Literary Theory*, Indian Conceptual Framework, 135). Walcott’s linguistic exploration can be seen in his poem “Names” where in the second part of the poem, he primarily dwells on collation of sounds which integrate with the sentence to create sound

and ironical effects. In these lines individual words don't evoke meaning and sense but these achieve meaning only in communion with other words :

“Listen, my children, say:
moubain: the hogplum,
cerise the wild cherry,
baie-la: the bay,
 with the fresh green voices
 they were once themselves
 in the bay the wind bends
 our natural inflection.”(Walcott, 28).

Here Walcott establishes a direct co-relation between nature and culture. He achieves it through creation, recreation and renaming of parts where sounds lend meaning integrated by internal unity which is central to Bhartrhari's concept of sphota theory. "The Spoiler's Return" is a brilliant experimentation of Walcott with calypso. He uses calypso as a form to bring the Trinidadian and Western forms of satire by making the Romans and English satirists in a calypso tent. This poem uses two forms of satire: the calypso which is an expression of popular culture and can be called 'little tradition' and literary tradition comprising the "great tradition". Words like 'bedbug', 'flocy', 'crab-back', 'shirt-jacs', 'dasheen leaf' and 'bohbohl' evoke sounds akin to calypso form creating the sense of creol culture. These words can be analysed by using Bhartrhari's **upadana sabda** ie linguistic units manifesting sounds and conveying meaning. The voice of protest runs through calypso couplets exposing the greedy rulers and hungry hunters who are responsible for the contemporary condition of Trinidad. These lines of 'Spoiler's Return' produce rhymed sounds where meaning evolves out of words, once these words are applied by the listeners as cause of meaning,

“Around the time I dead it wasn't so,
 we sang the Commonwealth of caiso
 we was in chains, but chains made us unite,
 now who have, good for them, and who blight, blight;
 my bread is bitterness, my wine is all,
 my chorus is the same: 'I want to fall.'”

(Walcott, 38).

Here one can perceive the **sphota** of the speaker, **nada** manifests **sphota** and **sphota** conveys meaning. Bimal Krishna Matilal rightly observed "The sound uttered by the speaker makes the real linguistic units, primarily a sentence, explicit, but this is sphota of the speaker. Sphota is also shared by the hearer, and as a result the hearer's sphota is 'awakened' by the utterance of the speaker. This awakening of the hearer's sphota is what is called the comprehension by the hearer of the sentence uttered". (G.N. Devy, ed. 2010, 377). The movement of the sound in words; 'so', 'caiso', 'unit', 'blight', 'all' and 'fall' resonate development of theme of the poem which indicate the bitterness of the colonial experiences of the poet. Walcott's poetry captures the rhythms of mind which in Bhartrhari's **sphota**, is the 'pre-verbal' stage further carried forward to **vaikhari** ie verbal stage. However, the sounds in the preverbal stage not necessarily require the comprehension of the sounds or **nada** as a condition. The cognition of an object is made through the faculty of vision ie eyes without knowing its all properties. In the above lines the sound of 'caiso', 'chains', 'fall' make sense only through their semantic arrangement and not as individual linguistic units. P.V. Kane explicating *Vakroti theory* writes "What is meant by

vastu dhvani is this that a mere fact is suggested by words that express another sense. What is meant by *alankara-dhvani* is this that what is suggested in imaginative thinking (not a matter of fact) which if expressed in so many words would assume the form of figure of speech (P.V.Kane, History of Sanskrit Poetics, 387-88). Kane's analysis of *vastu dhvani* is closer to Bhartrhari's concept of cognition and could be applied to deconstruct Walcott's speech rhythms and creol words used in different forms. To Walcott poetry is much more than a weapon as he wrote in "The Music of History", "the truest writers are those who see language not as linguistic process but as a living element" (Walcott, p.25). These lines describing his revisit to the villages of his childhood, are worth noting from the linguistic point of view, where with appropriation of words, reshaping of syntax, he finds an alternative speech that describes his world. To quote the poet:

"Pomme arac,/otaheite apple,/pomme cythere,/ pomme granate,/mountain,

Z'ananas/the pine apple's/Aztec helmet,/pomme,/I have forgotten/

... come back to me/my language". (Walcott, Sea Grapes, pp.35-36). The repetition of the word 'pomme' and thus sound reproduced in different contexts create meaning to convey his deep seated desire to return to his natural home from exile. Taken individually these words don't convey the exact meaning but kept in syntactical order present the sense of exploring as well as describing the world. Here Harold G. Coward's these words are relevant "The inability of the individual phonemes to convey meaning points to the *sphota* as revealer of meaning" (Harold, p.41). Walcott uses polyglossia and polyphonic sounds to create a new idiom of poetry in which sounds fuse into words and words flow out of sentence to convey meaning and thoughts. Commenting on his innovative experimentation with sounds, sentence and language Robert Elliot Fox writes, "The language is pluralistic, like the Caribbean reality, a combination of (literary) standard English, (oral), dialect English, and French; yet it is very much the poet's own, as evidenced by the assurance and control with which he shapes it" (Robert Elliot Fox, Ed. Anjanta Dutt, World View, p.247). Walcott's use of sounds as source of meaning and their subsequent co-relation with words and speech may be understood in this context by elucidating Mandana's commentary on the process by which *sphota* is cognized. To quote Harold "Each spoken sound or letter potentially reveals the whole of the *sphota*, which is already latent in the listener's mind. However, the first letter of the word only dimly begins to evoke that whole meaning in our awareness. The subsequent letters are needed to produce a clear cognition of the whole word. Upon the hearing of the last letter (e.g., 'w') along with the memory traces of the previous letters (e.g., 'c' and 'o') the complete word (e.g., 'cow') stands revealed in unitary intuition, or *pratibha*" (Harold, p. 43). In Walcott's poetry in general and calypso particular sentences, words and phonemes appear as distinct units which in their internal association undergo to form meaning. "The Spoiler's Return" subverts the hierarchy that undermines the creol. The fusion of standard English and localism can be discerned in sentences, words, phrases and syntax. Folk laughter and the ribaldry intrinsic to carnival traditions are present in the few lines of a calypso sung by the spoiler- "I sit high on this bridge in Laventille, /watching that city where I left no will...ghost in brown abardine, bones in a sack, /and howl, "AY, Spoiler boy! When you come back?" (Walcott, 36). In "Midsummer" Walcott explores some intimate personal moments which he achieves through a set of allusion of place, person and localized sound objects such as 'terra-cotta', 'oleander', 'logwood', 'twine' (rope), 'casuarinas' (tree with needle-like, leafless branches), 'fealty' (a feudal tenant's loyalty to the lord). Walcott's sustained engagement with polyglossic experimentation and calypso on the one hand, enabled him to create a new diction and idiom

for poetry on the other, he reinforces the fusion for conveying the desired meaning. The meaning lies in these words of Shabine “You would have / to be colonial to know the difference, / To know the pain of history words contain” (SAK, 12). Walcott reinforces meaning by creating a space for highly flexible cognitive level of the readers and awareness of the relativity of the things.

The awareness of the relativity of things helps readers in exploring the internal threads of words and sounds and their contexts which further help them in achieving the meaning in sentences. Bhartrhari (*Vakyapadia* 2.314-16) enumerates the following factors and conditions of context to felicitate the meaning:

“The meanings of sentences are determined according to the situation, word meaning, propriety... from. Meaning depends on connection, separation, opposition, context, indication, the presence of another word... suitability.” (Quoted from Kapil Kapoor, *Literary Theory*, p.144). Bhartrhari in addition to these factors also emphasises the utterance use as first condition of language, a dominant feature of Walcott’s poetry. Walcott uses letters, words and fragments of sentences as chains of the meaning and not separate units where parts are part of the whole. These lines succinctly explain the complex process of Walcott’s diction and syntax:

“I heard them marching, the leaf-wet roads of my head, / The sucked vowels of syntax trampled to mud, / a division of diction, one troop black, barefooted, / the other in red cross bright as their sovereign’s blood, .../ but both, in bitterness, travelled the same road.” (Midsummer, LII). Commenting on the primacy of sentence on language analysis as enunciated by Bhartrhari in the second *kanda* of *Vakyapada* Bimal Krishna Matilal writes, “The sentence is the unit of communication. According to Bhartrhari it is a unity, a whole, and not the result of joining together smaller units called words. The sentence-meaning is likewise a whole, not constituted by word meanings put together.” (G.N. Devy, ed., *Indian Literary Criticism*, p186). Walcott’s exposure to theatre taught him the magic of sounds which he partly imbibed from the Calypso tradition of Trinidad and partly from his obsessive love for sea. The metaphorical richness of verbal expressivity also depends on audience’s acute imagination. Speaking on the polyglossic incomprehensible sounds Walcott says “...grunts and sounds which you don’t understand so that words could turn into the very primal sounds”. (Walcott, ‘Meanings’, 48). Walcott doesn’t usually use one word continuously but chooses a specific sound according to the context. Walcott strongly believed that language is a weapon and through use of a new language he is asserting his identity. Houston Baker notes that African American artists have been particularly caught up with the question of language both as an instrument of self-making and as an element of political revolutionary power. (Houston Baker, *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular*, Chicago Univ. Press, 1987). Undoubtedly, in Walcott’s poetry such words and sounds assume many forms those of satire, irony, humour and aggressive verbal defiance.

Walcott has an eye for details and ear for sounds in his portrayal of scenes from the island there is interplay of light, colour and sounds which capture the sounds, music and the heart of the Caribbean people. Walcott gives voice to his people. In his poem “Sea is My History” there is ironical pathos when whiteman asks the native slave “Where is your renaissance?”. As a matter of fact, the natives have no renaissance. The black native’s answer is simple to it, which evokes the sense of history and belongingness: “It is locked in the sea-sands”. One can perceive humour in Walcott’s reference to the fish in the sea that resembles ‘the bald queen’ i.e. Elizabeth I. To quote the poet “...but where is your Renaissance? / Sir, it is locked in them sea-sands... to where the crusty grouper, onyx-eyed / blinks, weighed by its jewels, like a bald queen / and these

groined caves with barnacles/ pitted like stone/ are our cathedrals.”(Walcott, Worldview, p112).The variation in the tone is remarkable which changes from pathos to humility and from humility to sombreness.The tone becomes sombre when the native speakers compare the sea waves to cathedrals.These variations which readers notice in Walcott’s poetry are enshrined within the levels of language in *Vakyapadiya*.

Bhartrhari’s theory is applicable to Walcott’s poetry with reference to one’s experience of poetry.The **sphota** may be described as a two-pronged experience.On the one side, it is manifested by the uttered sounds, on the other, simultaneously reveals the meaning.In philosophical terms sphota may be described as a meeting ground in which the spoken syllables and conveyed meaning find themselves united. **Dhvani** implies the suggestive function of meaning.Anandvardhan was first to make use of Bhartrhari’s notion of **dhvani**. He says it is spoken words that suggest the inner meaning (*artha*) and eventually evoke the unified sphota.(Harold,85).It aggregates to the signified and the signifier in Walcott’s poetry.The function of causality in eliciting meaning occupies a significant place in Bhartrhari and so does it, in Walcott.There are other schools of Indian literary aesthetics enunciating the notions of **sphota**, mention may be made here of Patanjali,Abhinavgupta and Anandvardhan, but this paper is confined to Bhartrhari’s theory of **sphota** for analysing and deconstructing Walcott’s selected poems.This development leads to logical conclusion that the phenomena of sounds, words,rhymed speech, echoes and music that occur in Walcott’s landscapes of nature and sounds, conveying meaning and principal element of thought fall within the analytical and aesthetic framework of Bhartrhari’s **Sphota** theory.Finally,Kapila Vatsyayan’s these words though about the orature of vedic corpus, seem to me quite relevant about Walcott’s immortality of verse “The vedic corpus could be preserved for centuries only because of the system of intonation and recitation which broke down the word not only to its syllabic value but more.” (Kapila Vatsyayan, *Bharata The Natyasastra*, Sahitya Akademi,1996 ,p20).Walcott’s words- heard, articulated, intonated, resonated in musical form calypso ,are perennial source of aesthetic pleasure that tells the tale of the odyssey of a crusader for a new land and new language.

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