Human Communication: Insights from Vedic Philosophy to the New Visual World

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Abstract - The paper explores the evolution of human communication from the Vedic traditions to contemporary digital interactions. It contrasts the philosophical and ethical foundations of Vedic communication, rooted in texts like the Manusmṛti and Taittirīya Upaniṣad, with Western theories, highlighting the integration of ethics in speech. Advanced communication practices in Vedic society, such as context-sensitive expression and large-scale rituals, are underscored, revealing a sophisticated understanding of interpersonal dynamics. The study advocates for frameworks that align indigenous knowledge systems with modern communication challenges.

Keywords: Vākya Vidyā, Śabda Vidyā, Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa, sahṛdaya, rasa, Vedic communication, digital communication, ethics, comparative theory

INTRODUCTION

From the resonant chants of Vedic seers to the instant messages of the digital century, the history of human communication embodies a profound civilizational journey. Communication has continuously shaped human thought, social organization, and the transmission of knowledge across historical periods. This study examines the philosophical foundations, practices, and social significance of communication in the Vedic tradition, and traces their transformation into contemporary, technology-mediated forms of interaction. While the media and forms of communication have changed radically, humanity's pursuit of knowledge, connection, and continuity remains constant.

The Vedas, derived from the root *vid* ("to know"), constitute foundational sources of knowledge. They place central emphasis on speech (*Vāk*), associated with Saraswati, the divine principle of verbal articulation and reflective thought (*vicāra*). Speech is understood not merely as a tool for expression but as a sacred medium for realizing, preserving, and transmitting knowledge across generations.

ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF COMMUNICATION

The ethical dimension of communication is central to Hindu intellectual traditions. The *Manusmṛti* articulates a nuanced framework:

satyaṃ brūyāt priyaṃ brūyān na brūyāt satyam apriyam |
priyaṃ ca nānṛtaṃ brūyād eṣa dharmaḥ sanātanaḥ ||
(Manusmṛti 4.138)

"Speak the truth; speak what is pleasant; do not speak truth in a manner that is unpleasant; nor speak what is pleasant if it is untrue. This is the eternal law."

Similarly, the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* instructs: *satyaṃ vada, dharmaṃ cara*—"Speak the truth; follow righteousness." These teachings integrate communication with moral conduct, disciplined study, and character formation, emphasizing speech as a transformative and ethical force.

The *Atharvaveda Saṃhitā* and related disciplines of *Vākya Vidyā* and *Śabda Vidyā* reinforce this ethical framework, prescribing disciplined recitation, precise articulation, and ethical responsibility in communication. Figures such as *Vācaspati* are interpreted as divine or pedagogical guides, underscoring the sacred and educative dimensions of speech. Classical texts, including the *Nītiśataka*, further affirm that skilful and disciplined communication influences both individual character and societal harmony.

ADVANCED COMMUNICATION IN THE VEDIC AGE

Vedic society exhibited highly sophisticated interpersonal and collective communication. Texts prescribe context-sensitive expression of emotions, intentions, and social roles, demonstrating an advanced understanding of communicative appropriateness and emotional regulation. Large-scale rituals such as the *Aśvamedha Yajña* served as multifaceted communicative processes that reinforced social cohesion and cultivated group communication skills.

Sanskrit, with its precision and semantic depth, enabled the articulation of metaphysical concepts, ritual procedures, and ethical guidance, supporting a rich culture of dialogue and knowledge preservation. The concept of *Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*, elaborated by Abhinav Gupta in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, describes communication as a participatory process where meaning is collectively realized (*sarva-sāmājikānāṃ ekā bhāvanā*). The related notion of *sahṛdaya* highlights individuals capable of

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emotional and aesthetic resonance, emphasizing participatory and relational aspects of communication.

The Sapir–Whorf hypothesis asserts that linguistic structures influence cognitive processes and worldviews, a concept mirrored in Vedic literature. Here, language is portrayed as a transformative force essential for perception and reality interpretation. The expansion of language enhances cognitive possibilities, while its limitation constrains thought. Vedic texts emphasize meaningful language connections to sound, meaning, and cosmic order, integrating various realms through symbolic verses. Myths and mantras in Vedic literature parallel the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, proposing language as a cognitive framework and a means to reach ultimate truth.

Western theories of communication primarily focus on persuasion, with Aristotle's "Rhetoric" as a foundational text discussing the roles of speaker, speech, and listener. Harrold D. Lasswell proposed a model answering key questions about the communication process, emphasizing its mechanistic nature and effects. Berelson and Steiner define it as a transformation of ideas through symbols, while Charles Osgood views communication as an influence through signals. Wilbur Schramm emphasizes the circular nature of communication involving encoding and decoding. The Shannon and Weaver model (1949) includes five components plus noise, while David Berlo's SMCR model (1960) illustrates communication as a dynamic, continuous process across various media.

Semiotic Models of Communication highlight a shift in western communication theories towards understanding communication as a social interaction through messages. These models emphasize language, both verbal and non-verbal, as a sign system and focus on how meaning is generated and comprehended. Key questions addressed include the nature of signs, their meanings, and the relationships between signs, users, and external reality. Users are viewed as active meaning creators, suggesting that meaning arises from cultural interpretations rather than solely from the words or symbols used in communication.

Indian theories of communication are deeply rooted in religious literature, philosophy, and fine arts, with the term "Sadhranikaran" representing a key concept that emphasizes commonality and mutual understanding, particularly among 'Sahridayas' (those who can receive messages). This framework prioritizes an inward search for meaning and self-awareness, distinguishing it from Western theories that focus on linear, sender-oriented processes. The Indian approach is more relational and ethical, emphasizing the importance of social harmony and aesthetic experience, while highlighting the hierarchical nature of communication relationships, which can foster both cultural richness and social rigidity. Additionally, Indian communication theories draw from fine arts, illustrating emotions through permanent moods ('bhava') that enhance the communicative experience.

COMPARISON: WESTERN AND INDIAN THEORIES OF COMMUNICATION

Western communication theories focus on linear, process-oriented, and sender-centric approaches, prioritizing clarity and control, while often overlooking relational and ethical dimensions. In contrast, Indian communication theory, rooted in Hindu philosophy and governed by Dharma, emphasizes relational and ethical aspects, aiming for harmony and mutual understanding. Key elements such as intention (bhāva), emotional resonance (sahṛdaya), aesthetic experience (rasa), and collective meaning-making (Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa) provide a holistic framework unique to Indian perspectives, integrating ethical and aesthetic considerations.

THE NEW VISUAL WORLD

Contemporary communication is increasingly influenced by visually mediated, technology-driven interactions, termed the new visual world. This evolution has transitioned from emails and voice messages to webcams, video conferencing, and interactive digital interfaces, propelled by high-speed mobile networks. Such advancements have transformed human communication, prompting theorists to analyze visual and multimodal interactions that cross cultural and geographical boundaries. While this shift promotes connectivity, it also presents challenges involving visual literacy, multimodal interpretation, and digital etiquette, thereby reshaping traditional concepts of local identity and necessitating new theoretical frameworks in communication studies.

Need of New Frameworks:

There is an urgent need of frameworks that bridge indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) with modern communication and technological challenges to promote sustainable development, cultural preservation, and effective information exchange. Integrating traditional wisdom with contemporary tools is essential for tackling modern environmental and social issues andto preserve document, and share traditional knowledge. IKS should be combinedwith modern digital tools (e.g., mobile apps, GIS, and social media) Theey should not be treated as irreconcilable systems. Traditional methods—such as storytelling, local organizations, and folk media should be used for effective communication in rural areas, overcoming the limitations of modern digital communication systems .Utilizing traditional ecological knowledge alongside scientific data for better conservation. Incorporating IKS into modern curricula will enhance cognitive development and cultural relevance in education sector Leveraging traditional practices related to health and agriculture should be promoted for community health and sustainable farming. The research indicates that such alignment helps create a "hybrid" system that maintains cultural integrity while leveraging the power of modern communication.

CONCLUSIONS

Hindu Communication Studies, or Vakya Vidya, encompasses knowledge about speech and communication techniques, with roots in Sruti texts and practical applications

found in works like the Nāṭyaśāstra. The Hindu Vedic tradition offers many philosophical schools and texts relevant to communication, including Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra and Bhartrihari's Vakyapadiya. Sadharanikaran, a theory based on Nāṭyaśāstra, emphasizes content, emotional resonance, and ethical intent in contrast to the more mechanical, process-oriented nature of Western theories. This divergence underlines the distinct philosophical foundations of each tradition. The rise of digital and visual communication is expected to reshape communication studies, fostering integrative frameworks and expanding methodological scope.

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