

Sabda-Pramana: The Written and Spoken Word as Means for Right Knowledge. An Issue of Nyaya Epistemology

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1. Introduction

The 'word', especially in its written form, is ultimately the theme of this Seminar. A book contains words, organized in a logical, meaningful and consequential manner. Book is also spoken word; the authors speak to us indirectly through the books, and they intend to influence us through these words. In spite of the onslaught of electronic media and internet revolution, printed books still hold great sway in the life of educated people. Book is definitely one of the most beneficial things that has happened to humanity. Thomas Carlyle, the famous Scottish philosopher of nineteenth century, says: "Of the things which man can do or make here below, by far the most momentous, wonderful, and worthy are the things we call books".

Of all the philosophers and language-theorists of the world, Indian thinkers are the ones, who have dived deep into the inner intricacies of the word and language. Indian philosophical systems normally launch their deliberations with the elucidation of *Pramana*, that is, the means for right knowledge. What are the ways and means of knowing the objects and making right judgment based on this knowledge? This is the basic question they ask. The number of the means for right knowledge differs from system to system.¹

2. Nyaya School of Philosophy

Nyaya system of philosophy is founded by sage Gautama; its foundational text is the *Nyaya Sutra*, supposed to have been written around 600 BCE. *Nyaya-sutra* was commented upon by Vatsyayana (beginning of fourth century CE) by his *Nyaya-bhasya*. Later Udyodakara (ca.635) wrote a *Vartika* on this *Nyaya-bhasya*. Vacaspati Misra (ca.840) wrote a commentary on the *Vartika* entitled *Nyaya-varttika-Tatparya-tika*. Three other important works are

¹(i) The *Carvakas* (Indian materialists) accept only one means for right knowledge, namely, perception (*pratyaksa*). They believed only in objects which can be directly experienced through sense organs. (ii) The Vaisesika philosophy and some schools of Buddhism (Yogacara school of Vijnana-vada Buddhism) recognize perception and inference (*anumana*) as means for valid knowledge. (iii) The Samkhya system and Visistadvaita Vedanta of Ramanuja have three: Perception, inference and verbal testimony (*sabda*). Jainism too accept these three. Jains have particular interest in the three types of extraordinary perception, namely, *avadhi-jnana*, *manah-paryaya-jnana* and *kevala-jnana*. (iv) The Nyaya school adds one more to the three mentioned above, namely, comparison or analogy (*upamana*). (v) The Mimamsa of Prabhakara accepts five means for right knowledge: four are mentioned above, the fifth one is presumption (*arthapatti*). (vi) Finally, the Mimamsa of Kumarila and Advaita Vedanta School of Sankara accept six means for right knowledge. They are: Perception, inference, verbal testimony, comparison, presumption and non-perception of the perceptible (*anupalabdhi*).

Udayana's (ca.984) *Nyaya-kusumañjali*, Jayanta Bhatta's (ca.880) *Nyaya-mañjari* and Bhasarvajna's (eleventh century) *Nyaya-bhusana*.²

Nyaya mainly deals with the four means of right knowledge, namely, (i) Perception (*pratyaksa*), (ii) inference (*anumana*), (iii) verbal testimony (*sabda*), and (iv) comparison (*upamana*). Our concern here is the *sabda-pramana*, the verbal testimony, as envisaged by this School of thought.

3. Vak, the Word

The title of this paper is "Sabda-Pramana: The Written and Spoken Word as Means for Right Knowledge. An Issue of Nyaya Epistemology". The concept and function of a library is the same thing: library is a storehouse of written words. Books, as mentioned earlier, contain intelligent words of the authors. Library is a right means to disseminate knowledge. Reading a book is in a way a dialogue between the reader and the writer.

Before we enter into *Sabda-pramana*, which deals with written or spoken words, I need to show the importance of word, *vak*, and its role in the language. *Vak*, word, is the basic unit of language.

A variety of ancient scriptures speak of the universe as created by word, or by cosmic vibrations. The Rgveda I.164.45 says: *catvari vak parimita padani tani vidur brahmana ye manisinah, guha trini nihita na gayanti turiyam vaco manusya vadanti*, 'The learned people know that the Vak's existence is limited to four forms. Three are hidden, they do not speak; and the fourth is what men speak'. The Sanskrit grammarian Bhartrhari states in his *Vakyapadiya* I.112: "*vageva visva- bhuvanani jajne*", 'It is *vak* which has created all the worlds'.

Bible also speaks in similar tone. The opening sentence of the Gospel of St. John speaks about the Word that existed in the beginning and this Word is identified with God, Word is God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

The eternal word manifests issue forth in four levels in a descending scale which correspond to the various levels of the existence of Reality: (i) **Para-vak** is the highest form of

² Udayana is the author of still other works, namely, *Tatparya-tika-parisuddhi*, which is a commentary on the *Tatparya-tika* of Vacaspati Misra, and *Atma-tattva-viveka*, a work against Buddhists. Vardhamana (ca.1225) wrote *Nyaya-nibandha-prakasa* and *Prakasa*, which is a commentary on Udayana's *Kusumanjali*. Sankara Misra (1425) is the author of *Nyaya-tatparya-mandana*, and Padmanabha wrote a sub-commentary on Varddhamana's work with the title *Varddhamanendu*. Visvanatha (seventeenth century) wrote a short commentary on the *Nyaya-sutra* known as *Visvanatha-vrtti*, and Radhamohana wrote still another commentary known as *Nyaya-sutra-vivarana*. Some other more modern works in Nyaya are: Visvanatha's *Bhasa-pariccheda* with its three commentaries, namely, *Muktavali*, *Dinakari* and *Ramarudri*; *Tarka-samgraha* of Annambhatta and *Tarka-bhasa* by Kesava Misra with its commentary entitled *Sapta-padarthi* by Sivaditya; *Tarkika-raksa* by Varadaraja with its commentary *Niskantaka* by Mallinatha; and *Nyaya-sara* of Madhava Deva.

In the *Navya-Nyaya* School too there were eminent scholars. After Gangesa's (ca.1200) *Tattva-cintamani*, authors like Vasudeva Sarvabhauma (1500), Raghunatha Siromani (1500) (his work is entitled as *Didhiti*), Mathuranatha Bhattacharya (1580), Jagadisha Bhattacharya (1590) and Gadadhara Bhattacharya (1650) wrote eminent commentaries on the great *Tattva-cintamani*. Bengal is the home of most of these authors.

sound. Its manifestation is in eternal and supra-mundane space (*paramam vyomam*) where all the sound vibrations build the various worlds and it exists in an undifferentiated state. It is beyond the reach human intelligence. Humans cannot make it an object of meditation, because it is beyond and above comprehensible formulations. The opening sentence of the Gospel by St. John is again relevant here: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). (ii) **Pasyanti-vak** is the sound vibration heard in the causal worlds. *Pasyanti* in Sanskrit means "seeing speech". A sage whose consciousness is concentrated in the causal body is able to "glimpse" the Truth in a vision or a revelation. Knowledge is acquired in the inner mind by sight without the use of the reasoning faculty or sensory data. Probably the sages realized the Vedic word, the texts of Sruti, in this word-form. (iii) **Madhyama-vak**: Middle word: is the sound as perceived in the subtle or the pranic world. A good example of this would be the thought-forms held in our mind. Probably the sages cursed and blessed people using this type of word. (iv) **Vaikhari-vak** is human word, it is our speech. It is the lowest form of sound and it signifies outward expression. This is the spoken word emerging from our throat.

4. **Sabda Pramana**

Sage Gautama, the founder of Nyaya School of philosophy, defines *Sabda Pramana*, as 'the instruction of a trustworthy person, who has immediate knowledge of the moral laws (dharma), and who is competent to guide others in the performance of their duties and the abstention from sins for the attainment of the good and the avoidance of the evil. Trust worthy persons (*apta*) are those who perceive objects as they exist in their real nature, and communicate their right knowledge to others for their benefit out of compassion for them'.³ *Tarka-Samgraha* of Annambhatta, the famous text book of Nyaya, explains Verbal Testimony in the same way: "Verbal testimony is a sentence spoken by a trustworthy person. A trustworthy person is one who speaks of things as they exist in reality. Sentence is a group of words, like: bring the cow. Word is that which has significative potency."⁴ Verbal testimony is of two kinds:

4.1. **Divine or Scriptural Testimony (*vaidika-sabda*)**

It is the testimony of the Vedas. Therefore, this testimony is most perfect and infallible. In general for the orthodox Hindus Sruti literature, which consists of four bodies of writings, namely, Vedas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanisads, are authorless, eternal, uncreated, self-evident and infallible. They are written or produced neither by divine nor by human intelligence. Sruti means what is heard. It is the revelatory part of the Hindu scriptures. At the beginning of each cycle of time the sages hear or see or realize these sacred texts. These are, therefore, the most holy and most authoritative texts of Hindu religion. However, Nyaya system teaches that these sacred books are created by God.

4.2. **Human or Secular Testimony (*laukika-sabda*).**

³ *aptopadesah sabdah* (Nyaya Sutra I.1.7). *aptah khalu saksatkrtadharma yatha drstasya arthasya cakhyapayisaya upadesta* (Nyaya Sutra Bhasya I.1.7)

Cf. Jadunath Sinha, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1999 (reprint), p. 592.

⁴ *Tarkasamgraha* of Annambhatta, Section VII. *aptavakyam sabdah/ aptas tu yathartha-vakta/ vakyam pada-samuhah/ yatha gam anayeti/ saktam padam/*

This is the testimony of human beings, and therefore, liable to errors. Only the words of a trustworthy person (*apta*) who always and habitually speaks the truth are valid. The Smṛti books, like the Epics, Puranas, Dharma-sastras, etc., have human authors, and therefore their validity and authority are less and lower than those of Śruti books.

Testimony again is of two kinds: (i) Testimony about perceptible objects which are found in this world, and in our day-to-day experience. (ii) Testimony of the imperceptible objects, which are found in next world, that is, in heaven, hell, in the process of transmigration, knowledge of the unseen results of karmas, etc.⁵

5. Process of Communication of Meaning of Words and Sentences

Words communicate the knowledge. Word is defined as that which is capable of conveying the meaning of the object which it designates. A sentence is a collection of words in the form of a statement. A book is a collection of sentences, organized in a logical and meaningful way. Library is a collection of books. The purpose and rationale of all these, namely, word, sentence, book and library are the same: to communicate knowledge and wisdom, and thus ennoble and elevate the spirit and psyche of seekers.

A sentence, to be intelligible and to communicate meaning in the right manner, must have four qualities or conditions.

5.1. Expectancy or Mutual Implication (*akankṣa*)

The words in a sentence are interrelated and need each other in order to express a coherent and complete sense. A few unrelated aggregate of words make no sense. A word may not convey complete meaning; it should be related in a logical manner to other words to bring about complete sense, judgment and consequent action.

5.2. Fitness (*yogyata*)

The words should possess the fitness to convey the correct sense and should not express contradictory meaning (*yogyata*). The sentence, 'quench your thirst with water', conveys full meaning because its component words have mutual fitness or compatibility. But the sentence, 'quench your thirst with fire', is illogical and unintelligible, because its constituent words are incompatible with one another.

5.3. Proximity of the Words (*sannidhi*)

Long intervals between the words also make no sense. Words should be pronounced or written in a continuous manner. A few words with long space in between will not convey meaning to the hearer or reader.

5.4. The Intention of the Speaker (*tatparya*)

There can be ambiguous situations in which the meaning of the sentence is not clear; it is ambiguous. Some words may have two meanings. Here the hearer has to make out the sense and meaning according to the context, and according to the perceived intention of the speaker. The example Nyaya gives is the following: the word 'saindhava' means salt as well as horse. If a man who is eating asks for 'saindhava', in this context what is meant is salt, and not

⁵ Cf. Nyaya Sutra I.1.8.

a horse. On the other hand, if one who is about to start a journey asks for 'saindhava', it means a horse, and not salt.

6. Word and Meaning

What is the relationship between word and its meaning? It is the Mimamsa School of philosophy, which has given deep thought about this matter. Mimamsa, especially the Mimamsa of Prabhakara, declares that Vedanta, which is the science that communicates the knowledge of Brahman, the supreme Being, cannot be counted as a philosophical system, because the Vedanta texts (Upanisads) on which the Vedanta system is based, cannot convey knowledge of Brahman (*brahmavidya*), as they profess to do.

According to Prabhakara-Mimamsa, the *Śruti* texts are divided into three broad categories: (i) The *vidhi* texts which are passages of injunctions or commands, (ii) the *arthavada* texts which are explanatory passages, either in the form of praise of the good that ensues from the correct execution of the injunctions, or in the form of reproof of the omission of carrying out a *vidhi*. *Arthavada* texts sometimes narrate legendary histories or episodes in support of *vidhi*, and (iii) the *mantra* texts which are mainly hymns of praise addressed to different gods.

6.1. Mimamsa: *Sabda Pramana* is Expressed only through Injunctions

The Mimamsa of Prabhakara asserts that cognition through *śastra pramana* (*sabda pramana*) is possible only through the injunctive words, namely, the *vidhi* texts. The injunctions are expressed by the imperative mood (*lot pratyaya*), the potential mood (*vidhilin pratyaya*), or through the *tavya* terminations of the verbal roots.⁶ All other words or texts, besides these injunctions, are valid and can express meaning of the objects only in so far as they are subordinated to the injunctions, the commands (*vidhi-sesatva*). Thus the *arthavada* texts are valid if they are subordinated to injunctions. This means that the first and direct denotation or understanding of the meaning of a word (*adya vyutpatti*) is found only in Vedic injunctions, which enjoin 'such and such things are to be done' (*karya*) or 'such and such things are not to be done' (*na karya*). The common example of such an injunction is *svargakamo yajeta*, 'one who is desirous of heaven should offer sacrifices'.⁷

This means that the Upanisadic texts, which form the very foundation of all Vedanta systems, do not convey direct or primary denotations or meaning, because they do not command or enjoin something to be done, but speak mainly of an accomplished fact (*siddha*), namely, Brahman. Therefore, Prabhakara contends that the Upanisads, and consequently the *Brahma-sutra* and all systems of Vedanta philosophy, cannot convey independently any meaning directly, and hence cannot be considered as a true philosophy (*darsana*) which can impart knowledge.

How can an injunction convey meaning or denotation of words? The Prabhakara-Mimamsa would say that this is possible by observing the usage of grown up people (*vrddha-vyavahara*). The usage of older people in this respect is always in the form of an injunction or command given by one person (*prayojaka-vrddha*) and the injunction being carried out by another

⁶*tavya* is a *krt* affix or termination by means of which potential passive participles are formed from the verbal roots. Thus *kartavya* is formed from the root *kr* (to do), and it means 'should be done'. *Krt* is the group of primary affixes using which nouns and adjectives are derived from verbal roots.

⁷Salikanatha Misra, *Prakarana-pancika with Nyayasiddhi of Jaipuri Narayana Bhatta*, p.237 ff.

person (*prayojya-vrddha*). Thus, for example, one uses the injunction, 'bring the cow' (*gam anaya*). This is executed by another. And a third person who hears the injunction and sees the consequent action perceives the meaning of the words used. The meaning of words or sentences cannot be comprehended unless it is connected with such a *vidhi*. This view of Prabhakara is known as *anvitabhidhana-vada*, which means that normal words can only express meaning (*abhidhana*) as parts of some sentences of injunction, in which they are grammatically connected with one another (*anvita*). Thus, in the sentence 'bring the cow', the 'cow' conveys the meaning only in connection with the action of 'bringing' expressed by the verb.⁸ Salikanatha, one of the most important teachers of the Prabhakara-school, explains these issues in detail in his *Prakarana-pancika*.

Therefore, the primary connotation or denotation (*adya vyutpatti*) of words is obtained only from injunctions. The word 'vyutpatti' needs further elucidation. *Vyutpatti* is glossed as *saktigraha*. *Sakti* in this context means the relationship of the word and its meaning (*sabdārthasambandha*).⁹ The comprehension of such relationship is called *vyutpatti*. There are eight means for this comprehension of the meaning of the words. They are: (i) grammar, (ii) comparison, (iii) dictionary, (iv) words of a trustworthy person, (v) action, (vi) connotation of the sentence, (vii) explanation and (viii) proximity of a word, the meaning of which is already established.¹⁰ The Prabhakara-school declares, as mentioned earlier, that the first denotation (*prathama saktigraha* or *adya vyutpatti*) is possible only through action (*vyavahara*). The two kinds of actions are (i) verbal (*vacika*) and (ii) bodily (*kayika*). One who is already a knower of the word and its meaning (*vyutpanna*) utters the injunction 'bring the cow', to the second person. This is verbal action. The second person, who is also a knower of the word and its meaning, executes the bodily action. A third person, who does not know the words and their corresponding meanings (*avyutpanna*), observing the injunction (*vidhi*) and the consequent action (*vyavahara*), understands the words with their meanings. In this way all words are connected to some actions to be carried out.¹¹

6.2. Primacy of Vedic Word

Another allied teaching of the Prabhakara-Mimamsa is worth mentioning here. It asserts that valid verbal cognition through the means of knowledge of verbal testimony (*sastra-pramana*) is possible only through Vedic words. Non-Vedic words may convey meaning by inference (*anumana*), but not by *sabda-pramana* (*sastra-pramana*). Non-Vedic words may also describe things which were already existing in the mind of the speaker. These words are then to be categorized as the outcome of remembrance. But remembrance, or products of memory, has always only doubtful validity. Again, non-Vedic words are uttered by human beings, and human words can go wrong. But Vedic words are infallible as they are not the product of human intellect

⁸The followers of the Kumarila-school of Mimamsa and the Nyaya School follow the theory called *abhihitavaya-vada*. They say that the words by themselves express their meaning by the function of *abhidha*, denotation. These words are later combined in a sentence to form a connected idea.

⁹The logicians define *sakti* thus: *asmat sabdat ayam artho bodhavya ity akarako'nadi samketah saktih/* 'Sakti is the eternal convention in this form: 'from this word this meaning is to be understood'.

¹⁰*saktigraham vyakaranopamana-kosaptavakyat vyavaharatas ca/ vakyasesat vivrter vadanti sannidhyata siddha-padasya vrddhah//*

¹¹Cf. Salikanatha, *Prakarana-pancika*, pp.251 ff.

or efforts. Besides, Prabhakara advocates the theory of *svatah-pramanya* of the Vedas. Vedas are authentic and valid in their own right. Vedic words and texts do not need something else to prove their validity and authority. Salikanatha says:

It is only the Veda that can be called *sabda-pramana* and that also only when containing an injunction; ordinary words cannot be so; because the cognition afforded by them are purely inferential; when we hear a man saying something, our mind goes through the following reasoning: This man speaks of this after having known what he speaks, if so, what he says must be true. The speech of the man is an effect of his knowledge, and hence from effect we infer the cause. Thus all ordinary verbal cognition is inferential; that afforded by the Veda alone is purely verbal. It is true that all words are endowed with an inherent denotative potency; but in the case of ordinary speakers of the world, this potency of the word is obscured by suspicions with regard to the trustworthy character of the persons. In the case of the words of the Veda, there being no speaker, and hence no ground of suspicion, the potency remains unobscured.¹²

These two themes are the logical consequences of the philosophical and religious world vision of the Mimamsa of Prabhakara, namely, (i) only injunctions to do something convey the meaning or denotation of the words, and (ii) only Vedic words, which are infallible, convey cognition through *sabda-pramana*. These two doctrinal conclusions are very essential and fundamental for the Prabhakara-Mimamsa. Reflection on dharma in order to understand its true meaning and nature is the main aim of Mimamsa. Dharma for Mimamsa, especially for Prabhakara-Mimamsa, is *karman* in the form of Vedic rituals and sacrifices. The main concern of Mimamsa is to establish the supremacy of Vedic rituals and sacrifices. Mimamsa bases its teachings on the *karma-kanda* (the section of actions) of the Sruti literature. If the rituals and sacrifices enjoined in the Vedas are meticulously performed, they will, through the special power produced by the *karman* (*adrsta* or *apurva*), save the sacrificer (*yajamana*) from the cycle of births, deaths and rebirths. In fact the second *sutra* of Jaimini defines dharma as *karman: codanalaksano'rtho dharmah*, 'dharma is an object characterized by an injunction (to do something)'. For the Kumarila-school of Mimamsa, the word "codana" of the *sutra* means the Vedas as a whole. But for the school of Prabhakara this word can only mean the injunctions of the Vedas.

Thus for Mimamsa in general and for Prabhakara in particular Vedic words cannot be descriptive but only prescriptive. Mimamsa is the hermeneutics of the Vedas and is interested only in the analysis of Vedic language so that the Vedic rituals can be carried out properly.¹³ It asserts that the Vedic words cannot describe the supreme Being, Brahman, because it is not the object of an injunction.

7. Vedanta against Mimamsa on the Issue of Philosophy of Language

Of course, Vedantins do not agree to this position of Mimamsa. Ramanuja, the founder of Visistadvaita Vedanta School, has the following to say on this matter in his *Vedartha-samgraha*:

¹²Salikanatha, *Prakarana-pancika*, in: Mahamahopadhyaya Ganganatha Jha, *Prabhakara School of Purvamimasa*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978) pp.65 ff.

¹³Cf. J. Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, p.10.

The understanding of the transmission of *sakti* of words of accomplished things (*siddha*) is very easy. A person is sent by another person through gestures of the hand to say to Devadatta that the staff stands in the inner-room. He, having proceeded to inform it, uses the words, 'the staff stands in the inner-room'. A third person who stands nearby, who understands, as a dumb man, these gestures of the hand and who, although did not know before (the meaning of the word 'staff'), because he perceives now that the sentence 'the staff stands in the inner-room' is used for the information of this object, understands: "This word denotes this object."

So also a boy is instructed by the mother, the father and others slowly and many times by words like, 'this is the father, this is the mother ...', and at the same time by the indications of the finger to the respective objects. He, after having seen the denotations for himself, gains the knowledge about those objects indicated by those words ... and uses himself later the same group of words.¹⁴

8. For Mimamsa Vedic Word is Important, not God

Mimamsakas are atheists in the broad sense of the term, because they do not believe in the existence of a supreme Deity, who is the creator, ultimate cause of the universe and final goal of all beings. But at the same time they are uncompromising supporters of the scriptures and staunch promoters of ritualism. It seems, however, that these atheistic and anti-Vedantic tendencies were of later origin. Jaimini, the founder of the Mimamsa system, seems not to have been interested in actively denying the existence of a supreme Being. This fact is abundantly clear from the *Brahma-sutra* of Badarayana. Badarayana quotes the opinion of Jaimini several times on questions related to the eschatological dimension of man and of the nature of Brahman. Some examples from the *Brahma-sutra* will illustrate this fact. When discussing the question of worshipping *Vaisvanara* (*Chadogya Up.* V.18.1-2) as the supreme Being, Badarayana quotes the opinion of Jaimini thus: "Jaimini (says that) there is no contradiction even in accepting the direct (worship of *Vaisvanara* as Brahman)."¹⁵ In the same *adhikarana* another *sutra* declares: "Jaimini (says that) on the ground of reflection (the highest Lord may be called as existing in particular parts of the body), because it is shown thus (in the Sruti)".¹⁶ Again another *sutra* refers to Jaimini: "Jaimini (thinks that the mention of the individual self) has also another aim, (namely, the reference to Brahman which is different from the individual self), on account of the question and answer; some others also think thus."¹⁷ Still another *sutra*: "Jaimini (says that) it is the supreme (Brahman), because of the primary connotation."¹⁸ Badarayana quotes Jaimini's opinion again: "Jaimini (thinks that the individual self in *moksa* is endowed with) qualities belonging to Brahman,

¹⁴ VSpp.272 ff.:

¹⁴ BS1.2.29: *saksad apy avirodham jaimini/*

¹⁶ BS1.2.32: *sampatter iti jaiminih tatha hi darsanat/*

¹⁷ BS1.4.18: *anyartham tu jaiminih prasna-vyakhyanabhyam api caivam eke/* The context of this *sutra* is the following: *Kausitaki Up.* IV.19. reports the conversation between Balaki and Ajatasatru. Ajatasatru says: 'O Balaki, he who is the creator of persons, he, of whom this is the work, he alone is to be known'. The Samkhya philosophy thinks that this person to be known is the Purusa (individual self). Jaimini's opinion is quoted in this *sutra*.

¹⁸ BSIV.3.11: *param jaimini mukhyatvat/*

because of the descriptions (in the *Sruti*).¹⁹ It is evident from these texts that Jaimini was not against the concept of God. In his *Mimamsa-sutras* Jaimini shows no interest in the question of God, because his primary concern was to establish the importance of *karman* (religious duty and ritual). It was his followers who stoutly denied the existence of a supreme Being.

It has already been mentioned that Mimamsakas are adamant and resolute advocates of the *Sruti* texts and a world view based on rituals.

9. Philosophy of Language

Bhartrhari (fifth century CE) is perhaps the most eminent philosopher of language and theorist of language. He is the strongest proponent of *śabda-advaita*, word-monism, or speech monism (*Advaita*), which identifies word, language and cognition with supreme Being. The ultimate Reality is expressible in language, the *śabda-brahman*, or the *verbum eternum*. His magnum opus *Vakyapadiya* is an eminent treatise of grammar and philosophy. This work is divided into three books, the *Brahma-kanda*, (or *Agama-samuccaya*), the *Vakya-kanda*, and the *Pada-kanda* (or *Prakirnaka*, 'on manifold subjects'). The work starts with an excellent verse, which sets the tone of the entire work:

*anadi-nidhanam brahma sabda-tattvam yad aksaram /
vivartate 'rtha-bhavena prakriya jagato yatah //*

"The changeless essence of the word is all there is. It (word) has no beginning; nor does it come to end. It manifests transformed: through aims and objects, as they come to be. From it proceeds the changing world" (*Vakyapadiya* I.1). This is reminiscent of the Tantric doctrine that the cosmos is created by word/sound. This universe is set in motion by the primeval throb or pulsation (*adya-spanda*); following that everything is created by sound: *artha-srsteh puram sabda-srstih*, 'sound precedes the creation of the world'.

10. The *Sphota-vada*: Patanjali and Bhartrhari

10.1. What is *Sphota*?

The word "*Sphota*" means 'bursting forth', 'spurting out', 'gushing out', etc. It is derived from the verbal root *sphu*, meaning 'to burst'. *Sphota* is a very important element of Sanskrit grammar. It deals with the process through which mind organizes linguistic parts or units into logical and coherent language discourse, and points to its meaning. It manifests the method of speech production. The meaning or idea bursts out in the mind when language is uttered; it is the carrier of thought. When mouth utters words, their meanings burst out in the mind.

Nagesa Bhatta (also known as Nagoji Bhatta) (1730–1810), a grammarian of great repute, defines *Sphota* as *sphutati prakasate'rtho'smad iti sphotah*, 'that from which the meaning bursts forth or, shines forth is the *Sphota*'. In other words, the word that expresses a meaning, or the process of expressing a meaning through a word, is called *Sphota*.

Sphoṭa means to say that in the use of word and language, the speaker is also revealing his consciousness.

10.2. Patanjali

¹⁹BS IV.4.5: *brahmena jaiminir upanyasadibhyah/*

Patanjali (second century BCE), the author of the *Mahabhasya*, is the first philosopher of *Sphota* theory, in reference to the "bursting forth" of meaning or idea on the mind as language is uttered. For him *Sphoṭa* is the concomitant quality of speech. The acoustic element (*dhvani*), that is, what one hears, can be long or short, loud or soft, but the *Sphoṭa* remains unaffected by individual speaker's differences in terms of sound, modulations, rhythm etc. Thus, a single letter or sound (*varṇa*) such as 'ka', 'ca', or, vowels like 'a', 'e', is an abstraction, distinct from the components produced in actual articulation.

10.3. Bhartrhari

The *Sphota-vada's* greatest proponent is Bhartrhari (fifth century CE) with his work *Vakyapadiya*. Bhartrhari theorized the act of speech as being made up of three stages, which in a way correspond to the three levels of the descent of the word, which I mentioned earlier. They are: (i) Conceptualization by the speaker (*Pasyanti* - 'idea'); (ii) Act of speaking (*Madhyama* - 'medium'); (iii) Comprehension by the hearer (*Vaikhari* - 'complete utterance').

Again Bhartrhari builds on Patanjali's idea of *Sphota*, and discusses it in three levels: (i) *Varṇa-sphoṭa*, at the syllable level; (ii) *Pada-sphoṭa*, at the word level, and (iii) *Vakya-sphoṭa*, at the sentence level. He makes a distinction between *Sphoṭa*, which is whole and indivisible, and 'nada', the sound, which is sequenced and therefore divisible. The *Sphoṭa* is the causal root, the intention, behind an utterance, in which sense is similar to the notion of lemma (that is, a philosophical statement you accept as true) in most psycho-linguist theories of speech production. However, *Sphoṭa* arises also in the listener, which is different from the lemma position. Uttering the 'nada' induces the same mental state or *Sphoṭa* in the listener - it comes as a whole, in a flash of recognition or intuition (*pratibhā*, 'shining forth'). This is particularly true for *Vakya-sphoṭa* or sentence-vibration, where the entire sentence is thought of (by the speaker), and grasped (by the listener) as a whole. For Bhartrhari the very process of thinking involves vibrations, so that thought has some sound-like properties. Thought operates by *sabdana* or 'speaking', - so that the mechanisms of thought are the same as that of language. Indeed, Bhartrhari seems to be saying that thought is not possible without language.

Sometimes the *nada* - *sphoṭa* distinction is posited in terms of the signifier-signified mapping, but this is a misconception. In traditional Sanskrit linguistic discourse (e.g. in Katyayana), *vacaka* refers to the signifier, and *vacya* the signified. The 'vacaka-vacya' relation is eternal for Katyayana and the Mīmāṃsakas, but is conventional among the Nyāya. However, in Bhartrhari, this duality is given up in favour of a more holistic view - for him, there is no independent meaning or signified; the meaning is inherent in the word or the *Sphoṭa* itself.