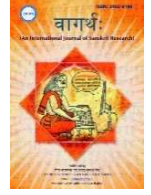




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## Defining Sentence: Various Standpoints of *Mīmāṃsakās*

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**Abstract**—Indian philosophies like *Mīmāṃsā*, *Nyāya* and *Vyākaraṇa* have given *śabda* a prime position in their metaphysics and epistemology and thus have contributed much to the analysis of the concept of *śabda*. They have analysed words, sentences and their meaning in a scientific way. *Mīmāṃsā* is the oldest system among the Indian Schools of thought, which tries to define a sentence. The preceptors of this school started a detailed analysis of sentences and developed elaborate canons of interpretation and in turn, this school was also known as 'Vākyaśāstra'. This paper tries to analyse the perspectives in which the school of *Mīmāṃsā* conceives the concept of sentence.

**Keywords** — *Śabda*, *Artha*, sentence, *Mīmāṃsā*, *Ākāṅkṣā*, *Yogyatā*, *Sannidhi*, *Abhihitānvaya* and *Anvitābhidhāna* theories.

### INTRODUCTION

Language is generally perceived as the method of communication and is essentially a social phenomenon, through which, we share our thoughts, experiences, emotions, commands, wishes, statements of facts etc. Ancient scholars in India inquired into this aspect of language and went beyond its mere communicative perspective. They portrayed it as the lamp that brought to light all the material objects. Had there been no language, everything would have remained in the darkness of ignorance. No knowledge or science would have originated. Language which thus spreads over all walks of life is not just a medium of communication, based on syllable-word-sentence, but it can be perceived as the carrier of thoughts and ideas. Thus, beyond its communicative level, language is something, which carries within itself the entire culture of a community. Therefore an insight into the working of it can be the beginning of the philosophical inquiry.

### Śabda and Artha

One of the fundamental problems in the philosophy of language, that has attracted the serious attention of all thinkers, is the relation between *Śabda* (the linguistic element) and its meaning (*artha*). The term *Śabda* is normally used to refer to a linguistic element, which is the meaningful unit of speech. Indian thinkers uphold different views on the linguistic element that is referred to by the term *Śabda*. There are two major approaches in the studies on *Śabda* and *artha*. They are *Sakhaṇḍa* and *Akhaṇḍa*, which

will be explaining in detail. According to various thinkers, it is the articulated phoneme (*varṇa*) or the word (*pada*) or the sentence (*vākya*). But all of them emphasise the role of sentence in communicating the ideas conceived by the speaker. Therefore, the study of sentence and sentence-meaning became one of the major concerns of linguists, grammarians and philosophers. The studies on the aspects of sentence and sentence-meaning in ancient India are disseminated in the different systems of knowledge. The scholars in the Schools of *Mīmāṃsā*, *Nyāya* and *Vyākaraṇa* have devoted their effort to unravel the basic problems regarding these concepts. While analysing the concept of sentence, ancient thinkers tried to deal with two vexed questions: What is a sentence? and What constitutes the sentence-meaning? They have tried to address these questions from within their epistemological standpoints.

### The Concept of Sentence

The concept of sentence is defined in manifold ways in Indian schools. These notions can be summarised under two heads; *Sakhaṇḍa* and *Akhaṇḍa*. Almost all Indian philosophers are in fond of the first view, while Bharṭṛhari (hereafter Bh) and later grammarians cling to the theory of *Akhaṇḍaśābdabodha*. In the *Sakhaṇḍa* view, the sentence is the collection of words, which denotes a unified sense. The factors that constitute the unity of sentence are *ākāṅkṣā*, *yogyatā* and *sannidhi*.

### Defining Sentence; Perspectives of *Mīmāṃsakās*

*Mīmāṃsā* is the oldest system among the Indian Schools of thought, which tries to define a sentence. As stated, an early simple definition is seen in *Brhaddevatā*, one of the ancient works in *Mīmāṃsā* (2.117). Here, it is stated that "*padasaghātajam vākyam*", which signifies that a sentence is derived from the collection of words. It is in the *Mīmāṃsāsūtras* of Jaimini that we first come across the real definition of a sentence. He states that "*arthaikatvād ekam vākyam sākāṅkṣam cedvibhāge syāt*" (2.1.46), which can be explained as, a group of words serving a single purpose forms a sentence, if on analysis, the separate words are found to have *ākāṅkṣā* or mutual expectancy. Kunjunni Raja opines that *Mīmāṃsakas* are probably the first to enunciate this principle so as to deal with the passages of *Yajurveda* (1963, p.152).

### Ākāṅkṣā

The word '*ākāṅkṣā*' is derived from the root '*kāṅkṣ'* which signifies 'to desire'. Thus, the term literally means the desire to know something. Vācaspatimīśra defines *ākāṅkṣā* as the desire to know on the part of the listener (Tatacharya, Introduction, 2005, p.44). It can be simply defined as the desire on the part of the listeners to know other words or their meaning to complete the sense. A word is said to have mutual expectancy for another, only if it cannot, without the latter, produce knowledge of its interconnection in an utterance (Raja, 1963, p.156). In a sentence, a word (noun or verb) always require another word to complete the meaning of the sentence. If one says "*gāmānaya*" (bring the cow), the verb 'bring' requires a noun in the nominative case to complete the sentence-meaning. At the same time, a series of words such as 'cow, horse, man, elephant' does not convey a unified sense, as there is no connection between them because of the absence of *ākāṅkṣā*.

*Ākāṅkṣā* can be of two types viz. *utthitākāṅkṣā* and *utthāpyākāṅkṣā*. The former is the actual expectancy of one word for the other to give a unified sense, while the latter is the potential expectancy which could be awakened if necessary. For example, when one says to another "bring the cow", the latter may ask the question "which colour?" Then the speaker has to imply an adjective like 'white', 'black' etc. These potential expectancies have no limit because it can be awakened when the listener necessitates (S C Chatterjee, 1939, p.367). While expounding this concept, Raja refers to two types of *ākāṅkṣā*, described by the *Naiyāyikas*; one is psychological and the other is syntactical or grammatical (1963, p.163). The grammatical expectancy between the words in a sentence necessitates the syntactic completeness of the sentence, while the psychological expectancy gives rise to the semantic unity of the sentence. It is well explained by Nāgeśa, the great grammarian, as; *ākāṅkṣā* is the desire on the part of the listeners on hearing a word in a sentence to know the idea, which can be related to its meaning in order to get a complete sense (*Paramalaghumañjuṣā*, 1985, p.33). Here, the expectancy is on the part of listeners and is superimposed on words and their meanings.

### Yogyatā

*Yogyatā* is defined as the logical compatibility of the words in a sentence for the mutual association ("*arthābādho yogyatā*", *Tarkasaṅgraha*, 1971, p.154). The sense or non

sense of a sentence depends upon this concept. Śālikanātha gives a vivid explanation on the nature of *yogyatā* in his *Vākyārthamātrkāvr̥tti*. He states that the capability of words in a sentence for mutual association and this competence is to be known from experience (Quoted by Raja, 1963, p.164). Almost all the philosophers explain this by illustrating the sentence '*agninā siñcati*' (He drenches with fire). When one says 'he drenches with water', there is *yogyatā* or the consistency of the meaning, since drenching is normally done with a liquid substance like water. Thus, the sense of drenching and that of water have no incompatibility. But in the sentence 'he drenches with fire', the idea of drenching is not compatible with that of fire. Thus we cannot say there is *yogyatā*.

### Sannidhi

*Sannidhi* or *āsatti* is generally defined as the condition that the utterance of the words in a sentence should be contiguous in time ("*padānām avilambenoccāraṇam sannidhiḥ*", *Tarkasaṅgraha*, 1971, p.154). In other words, this is the uninterrupted utterance of words then they are in juxtaposition. When a person utters words at long intervals of time, they cannot establish any interrelation among them. What is worthy of note here is that the mere immediate sequence of utterance does not give rise to *sannidhi*. Kumārīlabhaṭṭa calls this immediate sequence of utterance as *anantaraśruti*. He distinguishes *sannidhi* from *anantaraśruti* as the continuous apprehension of words or their meaning in the mind (*Tantravārtika*, 1984, p.455). Prabhākara describes this concept in a different perspective. He believes that *sannidhi* is only the contiguity of cognition of the sense and not necessarily of words actually uttered (Raja, 1963, p.167).

### Various Standpoints of Mīmāṃsakās on Sentence

Śābara explains the definition given by Jaimini as referring to the Vedic mantras only, and the term '*arthaikatva*' in the aphorism is interpreted in the sense of 'serving a single purpose' ("*yāvanti padāni ekam prayojanam abhinirvartayanti tāvanti padāni ekam vākyam*", under Jaimini, 2.2.26). Though Jaimini coined this definition for explaining the Vedic sentences, it is capable of much more extended application. Bh reiterates this as one of the well-known definitions of sentence.

*sākāṅkṣāvayavam bhede  
parānākāṅkṣaśabdakam  
karmapradhānam guṇavad-  
ekārthaṃ vākyamiṣyate.* (VP, 2.4)

Kumārīla also sets forth the same view that sentence is a group of words. He says: "it must be concluded that those words on hearing which we are clearly cognizant of a single idea, must be regarded as one sentence, either ordinary or of the *mantra* and *brāhmaṇa*" (*Tantravārtika*, 1984, p.586). He explains the word '*arthaikatva*' in the aphorism in the sense of 'single idea'. Among his followers, Pārthasārathimīśra favours the view of Śābara and explains the word '*artha*' in the sense of 'purpose' (Ganganatha Jha, 1942, p.190). Someśvarabhaṭṭa in his *Nyāyasudhā* commentary, takes the term in the sense of 'meaning' to admit a wider scope of the definition (1984, p.681). Śālikanātha refers to Prabhākara's view in his *Prakaraṇapañcikā*. Here, it states that a sentence

is a group of words ("*padānyeva vākyam. padārthā eva vākyārtha iti gurumatasthitiḥ*", 1961, p.377). Ganganatha Jha argues that according to Prabhākara, the word '*artha*' in the definition of Jaimini stands for 'meaning' as well as 'purpose', for both are interrelated. He says that the words of a sentence must be related to the purpose, which is the most important factor in a sentence (1942, p.190). If we analyse these definitions, it may be noted that, like the *Naiyāyikas*, *Mīmāṃsakas* also accept the group of words as a sentence. But they lay stress on the necessity of *ākāṅkṣā* or syntactic expectancy among the words, in order to bring about the unity of idea or of purpose. Kunjunni Raja refers to some of the definitions of sentence found in *Śrautasūtras*, and he states that those definitions are based on the *Mīmāṃsā* views (1963, p.154).

*Mīmāṃsakas* do not admit a sentence as distinct from words and words as distinct from letters. Śābara refers to Upavarṣa, who says that the word '*gau*' is constituted by the letters *g*, *au* and *visarjñya*. Thus, syllables are comprehended by the sense of hearing and not anything different from it (Quoted by Tatacharya Introduction, 2005, p.15). Śābara then explains how the letters attain the status of a word. The last syllable associated with the latent impressions born out of the cognitions of each preceding syllable which gives rise to the cognition of the word meaning. In the same way the last word associated with the latent impressions of each word gives rise to sentence meaning.

#### Mīmāṃsakās and Sentence-indivisibility

*Mīmāṃsakas* refute the *sphoṭa* theory and the concept of indivisibility of the sentence, formulated by the grammarians. But they maintain that the articulate phonemes are eternal. Tatacharya summarises the view of *Mīmāṃsakas* as, *śabda* is none other than the articulated syllables and they are eternal. They are associated together to form words and sentences.

*śrotragrāhyā varṇā eva śabdaḥ. teṣāmeva vācakatvam - arthapratyāyakatvam. te kaṅthatālvādyabhighātavyaṅgyāḥ nityā vibhavaśca. ta eva varṇāḥ samuditāḥ padavākyavyapadeśabhājo'rthapratyāyaka ityāhuḥ.*  
(Tatacharya, 2005, p.115).

Thus, the *Mīmāṃskas* admit the articulate phonemes are eternal, while the grammarians accept the eternity of sound in the form of sentence.

Thus, it is the *Mīmāṃsā* School that started a detailed study of sentences and developed elaborate canons of interpretation and in turn, this school was also known as '*Vākyaśāstra*'. The earlier references of defining the sentence are also can be found in these treatises. The *Mīmāṃsā* School first introduced and the other schools of thought later accepted with minor modifications the three factors of *ākāṅkṣā*, *yogyatā* and *sannidhi* among the word-meanings, which constitute the unity of the sentence and its meaning. The major theories of interpreting a sentence, propounded by the two schools of *Mīmāṃsā*; *Abhihitānvaya* theory of the *Bhāṭṭa* School and *Anvitābhidhāna* theory of the *Prābhākara* School, are appreciated even by the modern structuralists. Many modern scholars from the East and West are endeavouring in deconstructing these theories in the light of structuralist and behaviourist theories.

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