

VERBAL TESTIMONY

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THE fourth kind of valid knowledge is Shabda or Āgama or authoritative verbal testimony. Its means is also called Shabda. It is defined as the statement of a trustworthy person (āptavākya) and consists in understanding its meaning. A sentence is defined as a collection of words and a word is defined as that which is potent to convey its meaning.¹ The power in a word to convey its meaning comes, according to ancient Nyāya, from God, and according to later Nyāya, from long established convention. Testimony is always personal. It is based on the words of a trustworthy person, human or divine. (Testimony is of two kinds—Vaidika and secular (laukika). The Vaidika testimony is perfect and infallible because the Vedas are spoken by God; secular testimony, being the words of human beings who are liable to error, is not infallible. Only the words of trustworthy persons who always speak the truth are valid; others are not.) A word is a potent symbol which signifies an object and a sentence is a collection of words. But a sentence in order to be intelligible must conform to certain conditions. These conditions are four—ākāṅkṣā, yogyatā, sannidhi and tātparya. The first is mutual implication or expectancy. The words of a sentence are interrelated and stand in need of one another in order to express a complete sense. A mere aggregate of unrelated words will not make a logical sentence. It will be sheer nonsense, e.g., 'cow horse man elephant'. The second condition is that the words should possess fitness to convey the sense and should not contradict the meaning. 'Water the plants with fire' is a contradictory sentence. The third condition is the close proximity of the words to one another. The words must be spoken in quick succession without long intervals. If the words 'bring', 'a', and 'cow' are uttered at long intervals they would not make a logical sentence. The fourth condition is the intention of the speaker if the words are ambiguous. For example, the word 'saindhava' means 'salt' as well as a 'horse'. Now, if a man who is taking his food asks another to bring 'saindhava', the latter should not bring a horse.

The Nyāya admits only these four pramāṇas. Arthāpatti or implication

¹ āptavākyaṃ shabdāḥ. āptastu yathārthavaktā. vākyaṃ padasamūhaḥ. shaktam padam. Ishvara-saṅketāḥ shaktiḥ.

is reduced to inference. For example, when we say: 'Fat Devadatta does not eat during day', the implication is that he must be eating during night otherwise how can he be fat? Mīmāṃsā grants the status of an independent pramāṇa to implication. But Nyāya reduces it to inference thus:

All fat persons who do not eat during day, eat during night;
Devadatta is a fat person who does not eat during day;
∴ Devadatta is a fat person who eats during night.

Abhāva or non-existence which also is regarded as a separate pramāṇa by Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsā is reduced here either to perception or to inference. Abhāva is non-existence of a thing and the same sense-organ which perceives a thing, perceives its non-existence also. If the thing is imperceptible and can only be inferred, then, its non-existence too may be equally inferred.

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SHABDA-PRAMĀṆA has got the greatest importance in Mīmāṃsā. Testimony is verbal authority. It is the knowledge of supra-sensible objects which is produced by the comprehension of the meanings of words. (Kumārila divides testimony into personal (pauruṣeya) and impersonal (apauruṣeya). The former is the testimony of the trustworthy persons (āptavākya). The latter is the testimony of the Veda (Vedavākya). It is valid in itself. It has intrinsic validity. But the former is not valid in itself. Its validity is inferred from the trustworthy character of the person. It may be vitiated by doubt and error and may be contradicted afterwards. The Veda is eternal and authorless. It is not the work of any person, human or divine. The sages are only the 'seers' not the authors of the Veda. The Veda is not composed or spoken even by God. The Veda deals with Dharma and the objects denoted by it cannot be known by perception, inference, comparison or any other means of valid knowledge. Hence the Vedic injunctions can never be contradicted by any subsequent knowledge. And there can be no internal contradictions in the Veda itself. Hence the Vedic testimony is valid in itself. (Prabhākara admits only Vedic testimony as real testimony and reduces human testimony to inference because its validity is inferred from the trustworthy character of the person. Again, testimony may give us knowledge of the existent objects (siddhārtha vākya) or may command us to do something (vidhāyaka vākya).) Kumārila admits the distinction between existential and injunctive propositions and limits the scope of the Veda to the latter (abhihitānvayavāda). The Veda deals with injunctions. Prohibitions are injunctions in disguise. The Veda commands us to do certain things and to refrain from doing certain things. It deals with the supra-sensible dharma or duty. If we follow the Vedic commands we incur merit and if we do not, we incur demerit. Action, therefore, is the final import of the Veda. The Veda is broadly divided into Vidhivāda or injunctions and Arthavāda or explanations. The existential or the assertive propositions of the Veda are merely explanatory passages which explain the injunctions of the Veda which are its final import. Prabhākara takes a strictly pragmatic view of all knowledge. Knowledge leads to successful activity. Action is the only import of knowledge. He, therefore, refuses to accept that knowledge deals with existent things. All propositions must be injunctive. All knowledge, whether Vedic or secular, points to activity. The so-called assertive or explanatory propositions in the Veda are authoritative only when they help persons to perform their duties (anvitābhidhānavāda).

Testimony is verbal cognition and is derived from the meanings of words which compose sentences. (To uphold the eternality and the authorlessness of the Veda, the Mimāṃsaka puts forward the theory that words and meanings as well as their relation are all natural and eternal. A word (shabda) is made of two or more letters (varṇa) and is a mere aggregate of the letters and not a whole (avayavi), though the letters must occur in a particular order. A varṇa is regarded as an articulated sound. It is eternal (nitya), omnipresent (sarva-gata) and integral (niravayava). It is different from its sound (dhvani) if it is spoken and also different from its symbolic form (rūpa) if it is written. The sound and the form are merely its accidental features which reveal it. A varṇa is eternal and immutable, while its dhvani and rūpa are momentary and changing. If many varṇas are spoken, they are manifested through a temporal series of utterances; if they are written, they are manifested through a spatial series of written symbols. The sound and the symbol are only the vehicles of the manifestation of the eternal varṇa. When a varṇa is pronounced or written in ten different ways, there are not ten different varṇas, but only ten different manifestations of the same varṇa. Therefore a word which is an aggregate of two or more eternal varṇas is itself eternal. A word does not signify the particular things which come into existence and pass away, but the eternal universals underlying these particulars. Hence the meanings or the objects denoted by words, being universals, are eternal and unchanging. And the relation between a word and its meaning also, being natural, necessary, inseparable and internal, is eternal and unchanging. This relation is not conventional. It is due neither to God's will nor to convention as the old and the modern schools of Nyāya respectively believe. It is natural and eternal. Language is not a creation of the human or even the divine mind. Philology is a natural science. The conventional element in language is secondary (sahakāri) and helps the manifestation of the eternal words and their meanings, just as light helps the manifestation of sight. The Naiyāyika also believes in the authority of the Veda, but he regards the Veda as the work of God and so challenges the eternality and authorlessness of the Veda. According to him, words are not eternal and language is due to the divine will or to convention. The Mimāṃsaka refutes this view and points out that only the sounds and the symbols are created and destroyed, while the real words are eternal. Words are manifested through human efforts. The sounds and the symbols are the vehicles of the manifestation of the eternal words.

But even the permanence of the word and its meaning and the relation between the two does not make the Veda eternal. The Veda is a literary work consisting of sounds and symbols. According to the Mimāṃsā view, all the uttered or written words are really permanent, though the sounds and the symbols through which they are manifested may be