UNIT 4  MIMAMSA

Contents

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 Theory of Knowledge
4.3 Mimamsa Theory of Error
4.4 Theory of Reality
4.5 Theory of Soul
4.6 Bondage and Liberation
4.7 Let us Sum up
4.8 Key Words
4.9 Further Readings and References

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This chapter aims to highlight the contribution of Mimamsa to Indian philosophy. A major interest of this school is interpretation. They can be considered to be the first in India to have embarked on interpreting the Vedas (germ of hermeneutic analysis found). Hence this chapter with varied sections on theory of knowledge and metaphysics aims to bring out this aspect. In fact, the section on theory of knowledge contains such interpretative analysis. Some of the basic features of this chapter are:

- interpreting the Vedas
- theory of validity of knowledge
- theory of error
- theory of reality (realism)
- theory of God

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Mimamsa is a philosophical school (advocating realism) in India which developed the ritualistic aspect of the Vedas. It must be noted that the Vedas depict two different aspects – the ritualistic aspect and speculative aspect. Of the 6 orthodox systems of philosophy (astika darsanas), - Nyaya, Vaisesika, Samkhya and Yoga developed their philosophies independently though owing allegiance to the Vedas. But Mimamsa and Vedanta are two schools which developed the two different aspects of the Vedas. While Mimamsa developed from the ritualistic side, Vedanta developed from the speculative side of the Vedas. In fact, it is because of this reason that
philosophers are inclined to name them as purva Mimamsa (early Mimamsa) and uttara Mimamsa (later Mimamsa). They were also known as karma Mimamsa and jnana Mimamsa respectively.

There are two ways in which Mimamsa is useful to us today:

(a) Gives a methodology of interpretation with which the complicated vedic injunctions regarding rituals can be understood.

(b) Provides a philosophical justification of the beliefs on which ritualism depends.

The faith underlying vedic ritualism is substantiated by Mimamsa in the following ways:

1. Belief in the existence of a soul which survives death and enjoys the fruits of the rituals in heaven
2. Belief in some power or potency which preserves the effects of the rituals performed
3. Belief in the infallibility of the Vedas
4. Our life and actions are real and not dreams

Jaiminiya sutra is the work that laid down the principles of this school – purva Mimamsa. Hence, Jaimini is thought to be the systematiser of this school of thought. Sabararswami wrote the major commentary (bhāsyā) for this work. There were many more commentators after him. But the two most famous and important commentators are Kumarila Bhatta and Prabhakara Misra who founded the two schools of philosophy named after them – Bhatta school of Mimamsa and Prabhakara school of Mimamsa. The term ‘Mimamsa’ etymologically means ‘solution of some problem by reflection and critical examination’.

4.2 THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

As Mimamsa was interested in interpreting the Vedas, they prominently discussed the nature and validity of knowledge, criterion of truth and falsity, sources of valid knowledge etc.

Nature and Sources of knowledge

That knowledge which gives some new information about something, and is not contradicted by another knowledge and which is not generated by defective conditions (like defective sense organ or fallacious argument) is valid knowledge. Mimamsa admits two kinds of valid knowledge – immediate and mediate. Immediate knowledge arises in the soul when the object is in direct contact with both the internal sense organ (mind) and the external 5 sense organs. This perception arises in two stages – when we see an object, there is indeterminate perception of that object – a bare awareness of it (knowing that it is an object but not knowing what object it is). This is indeterminate, immediate knowledge (nirvikalpaka pratyaksa). When we come to interpret that object on the basis of our previous knowledge we understand it as something. That is determinate perception (savikalpaka pratyaksa) which is expressed in statements like ‘this is a man’ or ‘this is table’ etc. These two stages of perception, no doubt, gives us valid knowledge. However, the objects are not known explicitly in the first stage. Yet, what is known clearly in the second stage is implicitly known in the first stage. This means that the mind only interprets what it sees in the first stage with the help of past experience. It does not ascribe something imaginarily. Hence perception results in valid knowledge.
Now, what we just saw is perceptual knowledge. Are there non-perceptual sources of knowledge? What are they? Mimamsa accepts five more nonperceptual sources of knowledge. They are: inference (anumana), comparison (upamana), verbal testimony (sabda), postulation (arthapatti) and nonperception (anupalabdhi). The last source of knowledge is accepted only by Kumarila Bhatta’s school of Mimamsa and not by Prabhakara’s school of Mimamsa.

The Mimamsa understanding of inference is similar to that of Nyaya and hence we need not discuss it here.

Mimamsa understanding of Comparison

After Nyaya, Mimamsa accepts comparison as an independent source of knowledge. According to Nyaya, we get valid knowledge of an object by comparing it with what is already known. That is, we understand the new object through comparing it with what is already known by us. Here, Mimamsa differs from Nyaya school of philosophy. To the Mimamsa, we do not get knowledge of the new object from the knowledge of similarity that exists between this object and the known object but we get the knowledge of similarity that is there between the object that is seen and the remembered object. For example, Nyaya would say that when we see a new object, namely a gavaya (or wild ox), we are told that the wild ox is similar to the domestic cow and that the difference is that the ox is wild. So we derive knowledge of a new object by comparing it with what has already been known. But the same example will be understood by Mimamsa differently. To them, when we compare the ox with the cow that is already known, we derive the knowledge of similarity that exists between the two. This source of knowledge is independent and cannot be classed under perception or inference as done by other schools of philosophy (except Nyaya). The knowledge of similarity is the new cognition here and that is not derived from any other source of knowledge, according to Mimamsa.

Mimamsa understanding of sabda

Sabda is knowledge obtained from verbal authority. This source of knowledge is very important for the Mimamsakas. It is with this that they are going to justify the impersonal authority of the Vedas. It was seen that sabda is of two kinds – personal and impersonal – that is, knowledge derived from the words spoken or written by an individual or knowledge derived from the Vedas which have not been written or spoken by any individual. Again, authority may either give information on the existence of something or merely give directions for the performance of an action. Mimamsa is interested only in the knowledge from the Vedas and that too, about the injunctions laid down in it regarding the performance of certain actions. In fact, they are of the view that any part of the Veda which does not give information on the performance of rituals but is said to speak about the existence of something (immortality of the soul or existence of god etc) is useless. They just wanted to highlight what is essential for the performance of rituals. Hence their philosophy is referred to as ritualistic pragmatism.

According to most of the schools admitting the authority of the Vedas, it is god who is the author of the Vedas. But for Mimamsa, Vedas are impersonal – not written or spoken by any person.
They come forward with elaborate arguments to suggest the impersonal authority of the Vedas by asking the following questions.

- If the Vedas had any author, then his name would have been known and remembered.
- Even those who say that Vedas are not eternal but produced are not in agreement with each other on the origin of the Vedas. Some say that god is the author of the Vedas while some say that it is Praja\textit{Pati} or Hiranyagarbha and thus the argument goes on.
- Those people, who regard Vedas to have been written, think vaguely on the basis of the analogy of ordinary books written by human beings and say that even the Veda should have an author.
- The names of certain persons are cited in the Vedas. But they are only seers to whom the Vedas were revealed or the founders of different vedic schools.
- Now, it may be asked that the Vedas are composed of words and that these words are produced and non-eternal. Let us see the reply by the Mimamsakas here. To them, the words are not really the perceived sounds. These sounds are produced by the speaker and heard by the listener, no doubt. But words are really the letters which are partless and uncaused. A letter, like ‘k’ is uttered and revealed by different persons at different places and times and in different ways. Though these letter-sounds vary, we recognize that the same letter is pronounced. This identity shows that the words are not produced at any time and place, but transcends them. (here, we find a linguistic analysis by the Mimamsakas).

Hence, Mimamsa regards words as letters which are eternal, as having an uncaused existence.

- The Vedas enjoin certain ritual duties which bear fruits like attainment of heaven etc. Now, if the Vedas have been written by anybody, then we have to ask who that person is who has the capacity to know the past, present and future in order to declare the connection between the action and its result.
- If we agree that the Vedas have an author then we might have to agree (with the Carvakas), that this author is a cunning deceiver because of what is contained in the injunctions.
- The Vedas are not vitiated by any defects to which the works of imperfect beings are subject.

Thus, the Mimamsakas hold that the Vedas are impersonal and that they are not the works produced by any person. The applicability of the Vedas to all times itself shows that they are not the products of a particular time, place and individual. The Mimamsakas very clearly state that this knowledge cannot be classified under perception or inference. They assert that the validity of every knowledge is assured by the conditions which generate that knowledge, so the knowledge derived from authority carries with itself such assurance of its own truth.

**Mimamsa understanding of postulation (\textit{arthapatti})**

Datta and Chattejee (see \textit{An Introduction to Indian Philosophy}, p. 325) state that “postulation (\textit{arthapatti}) is the necessary supposition of an unperceived fact which alone can explain a phenomenon that demands explanation”. When a given fact cannot be explained without supposing another fact, then this other fact is postulated in order for us to obtain knowledge of
that given fact. For example, when we see a man growing fat but fasting during the day, we
cannot explain how this is happening. The two facts of fatness and fasting cannot be reconciled.
In order to clarify this we need to postulate that this may be due to heredity or because he eats
during night. Unless we postulate this, we cannot explain the fatness of the person. This is
postulation. This knowledge cannot be brought under perception or inference. The person eating
in the night is not perceived by us; nor is there any inseparable (vyapti) relation between eating
in the night and becoming fat. Hence this source of knowledge cannot be brought under
perception or inference.

Another example that can be given here explains that this source of knowledge is used by us in
daily life. When, for example, we go to a friend’s house and we see that he is not at home, we
postulate that he must be somewhere outside. This is postulation. This postulation alone can help
us explain how a person who is alive is not to be found in the place where he is supposed to be
found. Hence this kind of knowledge cannot be grouped under perception, inference or
testimony. We also say that ‘industry is the key to success’. Here, the term “key” does not denote
the real key but suggests its secondary meaning. This is postulation.

Mimamsa understanding of non-perception (anupalabdhi)
This source of knowledge is accepted by one of the schools of Mimamsa – namely, Bhatta
school of Mimamsa and Advaita Vedanta. To them, nonperception is the source of our
immediate knowledge of non-existence of a thing. I say that a jar does not exist here only
because I do not perceive it. This is non-perception. That is, we should not conclude that all non-
perception leads to the conclusion of non-existence of what is not perceived. We do not perceive
a table in the dark; nor do we perceive such supersensible entities as atoms, ether, virtue, vice
etc. yet, we do not judge them to be non-existent. Why? This is because, if a thing should have
been perceived under certain circumstances, only then its non-perception under those
circumstances would give us the knowledge of non-existence of that entity. The supersensible
entities are those that are beyond our senses. So we cannot say that they are non-existent when
we do not see them.

Validity of Knowledge
Validity of knowledge according to Mimamsa is called svatah pramanyavada. Let us see what it
is. How is knowledge valid? What are the conditions of a valid knowledge? For example, if I
have to see a thing, my eye should be free of defect. If there is defect in my eye, then, I cannot
see the thing clearly. Hence, the condition that generates knowledge should be free of defect.
Only this will result in valid knowledge. Moreover, this knowledge should be beyond doubt.
Mimamsa draws two conclusions from this: (a) the validity of knowledge arises from the very
conditions that give rise to that knowledge, and not from any extra conditions (pramanyam
svatah utpadyate). (b) the validity of knowledge is also believed in or known as soon as the
knowledge arises; this belief does not wait for any verification by something else. This Mimamsa
view is known as the theory of intrinsic validity (svatah pramanyavada).
This means that truth is self-evident. It is not verified by any other conditions. That is, the validity of any knowledge is evident in the conditions that generate that knowledge. Now, what if this knowledge is contradicted by any other knowledge? In such a case, we infer the falsity of knowledge. Thus, while validity of knowledge arises from the conditions from which that knowledge arises, falsity of that knowledge arises due to extraneous conditions. Dr S. Radhakrishnan (Indian Philosophy, Vol 2) quotes, “ज्ञानस्य प्रमाणम स्वतः, अप्रमाणम परताह”

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space for your answers.


2. Explain svatah pramanyavada.

4.3 MIMAMSA THEORY OF ERROR

If truth is self-evident and every knowledge is true, then, how does error arise? For example, when we mistake a rope to be a snake we are afraid of the rope as long as we think it to be a snake. Only when we realize that it is not a snake and that it is a rope, we come out of that fear. Now, knowledge of rope as a snake is an error. How does this error arise when all knowledge is valid? There are two answers for this question in the two schools of Mimamsa – Bhatta school and Misra school. Let us look into them now.

According to the Prabhakara Misra school, every knowledge is true, and that nothing false ever appears in error. Their theory of error is known as akhyativada or denial of illusory appearance. Let us see that view now with the rope-snake example. When I perceive a rope as a snake, there
is a mixture of two types of knowledge – the perception of a long thing (perceived thing) and our memory of a snake perceived in the past (remembered thing). Here, the distinction between the perceived thing and the remembered thing is not perceived by us. Hence we are afraid of a rope as though it is a snake. Now, our behaviour towards rope is faulty and not our knowledge (because there are two kinds of knowledge here, namely knowledge of a long thing and our memory of a snake without the knowledge of distinction between them). Therefore, we do not erroneously perceive a rope to be a snake but that there is only a cognitive defect coupled with non-discrimination. This is negative, according to the Prabhakara Misra school of Mimamsa but not the same as error. Error is not merely want of knowledge but a positive mental state.

The Bhatta school of Mimamsa does not accept this view. To them, mere nondiscrimination cannot explain error. We cannot deny that sometimes the illusory object appears positively before us. If my eye-ball is pressed while looking at the moon, two moons positively appear before us. The snake illusion is also similar to this. Now, the Bhatta school argues that when we perceive a snake in a rope and judge that it is a snake, both the subject and the predicate are real. The rope is brought under the class of snakes which also exists. Then how does error arise? It is simple. Error consists, however, in relating these two really existing but separate things in the subject-predicate way. Thus error is always wrong relation and is not to be found in the object. The Bhatta theory of error is known as *viparitakyativada*. Thus the Prabhakaras exempt all knowledge from error while the Bhattas admit that error may affect some cognitive relations of objects, though the objects themselves are always correctly perceived. One thing common to both schools is that error affects activity rather than knowledge. Thus error becomes an exceptional case of the falsification of the normal claim that every knowledge makes for truth.

**4.4. THEORY OF REALITY**

Mimamsa theory of reality is based on their theory of perception. When we perceive, we perceive objects. Moreover, the theory of *svatahpramanvada* (theory of intrinsic validity of knowledge) enables us to understand the reality of objects. Mimamsakas are realists and pluralists. The universe is real and is independent of the mind which perceives it. Thus, the world is eternally there for them (it is neither created nor destroyed). However, they also seem to believe in souls, heaven, hell, deities to whom sacrifice is to be performed in addition to the world that is accepted as real by them. The Mimamsakas too, like the Vaisesikas, believe in the reality of atoms. However, they do not postulate an efficient cause for the arrangement of atoms in order for the emergence of the world. Instead, they believe in the law of karma to have regulated the order or arrangement of atoms. Being realists, they categorise the reality. Prabhakara admits of 8 such categories – substance (*dravya*), quality (*guna*), action (*karma*), generality (*samanya*), inherence (*paratantrata*), force (*sakti*), similarity (*sadrsya*) and number (*samkhya*). Kumarila divides all categories into positive (*bhava*) and negative (*abhava*). Prior, posterior, absolute and mutual are the four kinds of *abhava*. The positive categories (*bhava*) are also four. They are substance, quality, action and generality. He brings force and similarity under substance.
4.5 THEORY OF SOULS

Jaimini does not offer any detailed proof of the reality of soul. However, he seems to accept the arguments of the Vedanta. He distinguishes the self from the understanding and the senses. The self is neither the body, nor the senses nor even the intellect. It is the cogniser. Sabara accepts the reality of a permanent cogniser which is “known by itself and incapable of being seen or shown by others”, says S.Radhakrishnan (Ibid., p. 408). Their interest in interpreting the vedic injunctions as bringing fruits either in this life or in the afterlife has forced them to accept a soul which survives even when the body is destroyed at the time of death. The Mimamsakas accept plurality of selves in order to account for variety of experiences.

4.6 BONDAGE AND LIBERATION

According to Prabhakara, liberation consists in the total disappearance of dharma and adharma, whose operation is the cause of rebirth. Another important term that needs mention here is apurva (or unseen force or imperceptible antecedent of the fruit of our actions. All acts bear fruits. Of course, not all acts can result in its fructification immediately. Some may effect a result later. Jaimini assumes the existence of such unseen force as apurva. It can be considered as the metaphysical link between the action and its result. Now, it is this unseen force that determines whether the soul is in bondage or liberated. Hence Mimamsa prescribes that certain duties as enjoined in the Vedas are to be performed. These duties help man in the right path and thus are responsible for delivering good results. The highest good, according to early Mimamsa, appeared to have been the attainment of heaven or a state of bliss.

However, the later Mimamsa thinkers fall in line with other Indian philosophical schools in holding that the highest good is liberation or freedom from bondage to the body. To them, liberation is an unconscious state, which is free from pleasure and pain. Is Mimamsa atheistic? Mimamsa, we have seen, interprets the ritualistic side of the Vedas. Thus, this school emphasizes the idea of dharma – that is, the criteria of discussion here is how man ought to live; Whatever has been said about knowledge, its validity or about error is in relation to this idea of dharma. Now, what is their conception of God? Do they believe in the existence of God? It must be mentioned that the Mimamsakas believe in the authority of the Vedas. But the traditional conception of Mimamsa is atheistic – non-belief in the existence of God. However, authors like Max Mueller finds it difficult to believe that the Mimamsakas, who believe in the authority of the Vedas do not believe in the existence of God (accepted by the Vedas). The Mimamsakas argue that if a creator-God is accepted then He is liable to the charges of cruelty, partiality etc. Therefore, they deny any such creator-God. However, Max Mueller contends that this need not be construed as a case of atheism because, even Advaita Vedanta in India and Spinoza in the West do not accept a creator-God.
However, it must be mentioned that there is no reference to God by the early Mimamsakas while the later Mimamsakas reject the proofs for the existence of God. Thus Mimamsa seems to be atheistic. It might be pointed out that Mimamsa accepts Vedas which talk of a variety of gods – sun, moon, fire etc. These are, at best, deities who are not objects of worship. They are not referred to as existing somewhere bound by space-time continuum; nor are they imaginary entities. Instead, they are eternal and self-manifesting entities described by the eternal, self-revealing Vedas. The Mimamsa was interested mainly in the performance of rituals and these gods were spoken of only in so far as they help man perform the rituals with piety. Thus, we see that “in its great anxiety to maintain the supremacy of the Vedas, the Mimamsa even relegated God to an ambiguous position.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space for your answers.

1. Give the account of Mimamsa understanding of soul.

2. What is Liberation according to Mimamsa?

4.7 LET US SUM UP

Mimamsa is an orthodox school of Indian philosophy. It believes in the authority of the Vedas. Realistic (and pluralistic) school of philosophy. However, they are considered to be non-believers in god. Concept of *apurva* is unseen force that delivers the results of our actions. Concept of liberation is attainment of heaven (by earlier thinkers) and freedom from bondage (by later thinkers).
4.8 KEY WORDS

*Apurva:* unseen force that delivers the results of our actions.

*Svatahpramanyavada:* theory of intrinsic validity of knowledge.

*Viparitakyativada:* Bhatta theory of error - Error consists in relating two really existing but separate things in the subject-predicate way. Error is always wrong relation and is not to be found in the object.

4.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES


