

Satsanga with Sri Swami Viditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

Indian Schools of Philosophy (2 of 3)

Question

Was the Mīmāṃsaka tradition very popular when the Upadeśa Sāram was composed? Does it have a following even today?

Answer

We use the *pūrvapakṣa*, the position of an opponent, to unfold certain ideas and principles. Ramana Maharshi seems to begin the Upadeśa Sāram by refuting the position of the Mīmāṃsakas. This is a particular style of teaching. The essence of the first verse is that *īśvara* is the ruler and dispenser of the results of the actions and everything happens according to His rules. To make this point, a background is needed and the tradition of the Mīmāṃsakas forms a convenient background because they represent those who do not accept *īśvara*. Thus, this verse is being told to those who have difficulty in accepting *īśvara*.

īśvara is the *kartā*, the creator and the ruler. Everything takes place in accordance with His rules. This point is explained against the background of the Mīmāṃsaka's viewpoint so that it becomes clear to us. Thus, we may use the views of the opponent to make our own point. We pose questions and answer them; we present the opposite standpoint, show how that standpoint is incorrect, and then present the *siddhāntā*, our conclusion. These are questions that do arise in our own minds. This is the method of unfolding this knowledge. Whether or not there are Mīmāṃsakas today, there may be many who may have difficulty in accepting *īśvara*. All these people are taken into account and the first point made is that *īśvara* is the creator, the ruler, and the dispenser of the results of our actions. This is stated in the first line '*karturājñayā prāpyate phalam*', the result of action is obtained by the laws of *īśvara*.

The Mīmāṃsakas have done great service to the Vedic tradition. They are *vaidikas*, who adhere to rituals. It is not that there are many such traditional people nowadays. Ādi Śaṅkarācārya had to contend with the Mīmāṃsakas because they were very strong in his time. In fact, it was the Mīmāṃsakas who were largely responsible for establishing the Vedic religion in the context of Buddhism. When Buddhism, which rejected the Veda, had begun to spread in India, the great teachers of the Mīmāṃsakas re-established the Vedic religion and rituals. However, they went too far with the rituals; they believed that *karma*

alone is the means to *mokṣa*. Ādī Śaṅkarācārya refuted them and asserted that it was *jñānam* or knowledge that is the means to *mokṣa*. That is why we find arguments against the teaching of the Mīmāṃsakas in Śrī Śaṅkarācārya's writings.

The Mīmāṃsakas represent people who have an aspiration for *svarga*, the heavens. Not all Indians believe in non-duality; most are dualists, worshipping *īśvara* in Kailasa, Vaikunta or elsewhere. Most people have a plan to go to some *loka* or the other according to their tradition. There are no traditional Mīmāṃsakas as such nowadays. What we have are different schools of duality such as Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita. These schools of philosophy emphasize *karma* or *upāsana*. According to them, worship is the main means to achieve *mokṣa*. Only the Advaitins emphasize the role of knowledge in liberation.

In India, the mainstream accepts the existence of *īśvara*. However, each school of thought has its own views on the nature of *īśvara* and one's relationship with divinity. There may still be some traditional Mīmāṃsakas, but they are not in predominance. However, in unfolding the principles of Vedānta we refute the different positions of the Mīmāṃsakas, the Sāṅkhyas, the Naiyāyikas etc. These opposing positions are very important for us to understand and give us greater clarity regarding Vedānta. It is one thing to say that there is god. However, it is quite another thing to analyze the position of one who says there is no god as in 'What are his arguments?' or 'Why does he say that?' The position that there is god then becomes much clearer to us. Therefore, these positions of the opponents are taken up for discussion so that we may gain further clarity. Often, these questions or similar questions arise in our own minds. Therefore, even though we may be addressing a Mīmāṃsaka, perhaps part of our question is also answered when we counter the views of the opponent¹.

¹ 2005 Arsha Vidya Gurukulam Family Camp *satsanga*. Transcribed and edited by Chaya Rajaram and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.