

Īśvara in Nyāya Darśana: An Analysis in the Context of the Indian Knowledge System

Dr. Rajib Sinha

Assistant Professor & Head, Dept. of Sanskrit, Srikrishna College

Abstract:

The concept of Īśvara occupies a central position in Indian philosophical discourse, particularly within the Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika tradition. The Nyāya school posits Īśvara as the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent agent responsible for the creation, maintenance, and dissolution of the universe. This paper offers a detailed examination of the nature, attributes, and necessity of Īśvara from a Nyāya perspective. Classical sources such as the Nyāya Sūtras, Vātsyāyana's commentary, Bhāsarvajña's Nyāyabhūṣaṇa, and Udayanācārya's Nyāyakusumāñjali are analyzed. The discussion emphasizes the pramāṇas (means of knowledge) used to establish Īśvara's existence, including inference (anumāna) and scriptural testimony (āgama). Comparative insights with other schools—Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Advaita Vedānta, Śaivism, Mīmāṃsā, and Cārvāka—highlight Nyāya's distinctive position within the Indian knowledge system.

Keywords:

Īśvara, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, paramātman, jīvātman, pramāṇa, Veda, inference, consciousness, Indian philosophical systems

Introduction

Philosophical inquiry into the nature of ultimate reality has been central to Indian thought. The question "Who governs the cosmos?" or "What is the ultimate cause of order and morality?" has been answered diversely across schools. In Nyāya, Īśvara is presented as an intelligent, conscious, and moral principle responsible for cosmic governance. Unlike Sāṅkhya, which posits an uncaused *prakṛti*, Nyāya asserts that creation requires a conscious agent with knowledge, volition, and effort.

The acceptance of Īśvara in Nyāya is both philosophical and epistemic: it is necessary to account for the universe's ordered structure, the fruits of karma, and the authority of scriptural knowledge (*śāstras*). Nyāya thinkers systematically demonstrate that the denial of Īśvara leads to logical inconsistencies, especially concerning the origination and regulation of the cosmos.

The Necessity of Īśvara in Nyāya Philosophy

Human society's philosophical tradition has consistently accorded a unique and indispensable place to the concept of Īśvara. Across nearly all civilizations, one finds the conception of a transcendent reality that is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. This supreme power is understood as the regulator of the creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the universe. When propitious, it relieves human suffering and bestows profound happiness; when displeased, it

is capable of bringing about destruction. As the governing principle of the cosmic order, this power has been designated by various names in different cultures, such as Īśvara and others.

For a humanity afflicted by the threefold sufferings (trividha-duḥkha), the idea of Īśvara has become not merely a psychological need but an existential inevitability. The Indian philosophical tradition is no exception. The significance of Īśvara in Indian thought is evident from the conventional usage of the terms “āstika” (orthodox) and “nāstika” (heterodox), which came to denote those who accept or reject the authority of the Vedas—and, in later usage, the existence of Īśvara—though this was not their original meaning.

In Indian philosophy, the schools that affirm Īśvara generally establish His existence on four principal grounds. First, Īśvara is accepted as the creator, sustainer, and destroyer of the universe. Second, He is regarded as the author of the Vedas, which are held to be infallible and authoritative sources of knowledge. Third, the just and orderly dispensation of the fruits of actions (karma-phala) necessitates a conscious moral governor. Fourth, Īśvara is upheld as the highest and most exalted object of meditation. According to the Nyāya school, both direct and inferential reasoning support the acceptance of Īśvara on these grounds. Nyāya distinguishes between two kinds of self: the individual self (jīvātman) and the Supreme Self (paramātman). Although both are selves, they differ fundamentally.

The individual self is finite, limited in knowledge, imperfect, and subject to bondage; whereas the Supreme Self is eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, infinite, and perfect. The individual self is the experiencer of the fruits of action, bound, dependent, and manifold; in contrast, the Supreme Self is the dispenser of those fruits, free, independent, and one.

Whereas the powers of the individual self are limited, the Supreme Self is endowed with boundless śakti and divine attributes such as aṇimā, mahimā, garimā, and laghimā. He alone is the creator, sustainer, and dissolver of the cosmos.

A significant philosophical question arises here: if Īśvara is incorporeal, how can He be an agent of action? The Nyāya response is that inert matter (prakṛti) cannot, by itself, account for the ordered functioning of the universe. A supremely intelligent and powerful conscious principle is required. Although Īśvara is bodiless, embodiment is not essential for agency. Rather, cognition (knowledge), volition (cikīrṣā), and effort are the true conditions of action—and these are perfectly present in God.

Īśvara is thus likened to a cosmic potter: just as a potter fashions a pot out of clay, Īśvara brings the universe into being through the arrangement of atoms. In this sense, He is omniscient—the ultimate knower of all actions and their moral consequences. He is the inner controller (antaryāmin) and the omnipotent governor. Inert nature, being unconscious and limited, cannot assume the role of an intelligent cause. Hence, the acceptance of Īśvara, in some form, becomes philosophically compelling. As stated in the Sarvasiddhāntasaṅgraha:

*kāla-krama-pradhānād eka-caitanyaḥ chivo'paraḥ |
alpajñatvāt tu jīvānāṃ grāhyaḥ sarvajña eva saḥ ||¹*

This verse affirms that the ultimate cause of the universe cannot be reduced to time (kāla), sequence (krama), or primordial matter (pradhāna), but must be a distinct conscious reality—Śiva, the Supreme Being. Since individual selves are limited in knowledge, the acceptance of an omniscient Īśvara is both reasonable and necessary.

¹ Śaṅkarācārya (attrib.). *Sarvasiddhāntasaṅgraha*, P-46

The Ṛgveda presents a profound allegory of two birds seated on the same tree—close companions and co-dwellers. Of these, one bird partakes of the sweet fruits of the tree, while the other does not partake but merely witnesses its companion. This imagery symbolizes the individual self (jīvātman), who experiences the fruits of actions, and the Supreme Self (paramātman), who remains the detached witness and inner guide.

A similar idea is expressed in the Bhagavadgītā, where it is said:

*īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānāṃ hr̥ddeśe 'rjuna tiṣṭhati |
bhrāmāyan sarvabhūtāni yantrārūḍhāni māyayā ||²*

Īśvara resides in the hearts of all beings and directs them, as if mounted on a machine, according to their karma. In Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika philosophy, the Supreme Self is endowed with eight qualities. Among them, knowledge (jñāna), will (icchā), and effort (prayatna) are special attributes; while number (saṃkhyā), magnitude (parimāṇa), distinctness (pṛthaktva), conjunction (saṃyoga), and disjunction (vibhāga) are general attributes. Īśvara is one in number and infinite in magnitude. His knowledge, will, and effort are eternal and all-encompassing.

Logical Proofs for Īśvara (Udayanacharya / Bhāsarvajña)

Udayanācārya, in his Nyāyakusumāñjali, systematically refuted atheistic positions through five major objections (vipratipatti), representing the views of Cārvāka, Mīmāṃsā, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sāṅkhya. Each is critically examined and resolved. He further establishes the existence of Īśvara through nine inferential proofs, summarized as:

*kāryāyojanadhṛtyādeḥ padāt pratyayataḥ śruteḥ |
vākyaṭ saṃkhyā-viśeṣāc ca sādhyo viśvavid avyayaḥ ||³*

These arguments may be briefly outlined as follows:

Kāryāt (Effect): The world, being an effect, must have an intelligent cause, just as a pot requires a potter.

Āyojanāt (Combination): The initial combination of atoms presupposes conscious effort.

Dhṛteḥ (Sustenance): The stability of the cosmos implies a sustaining conscious principle.

Vināśāt (Dissolution): Cosmic dissolution also requires an intelligent agent.

Padāt (Linguistic usage): Meaningful language presupposes a conscious originator.

Pratyayāt (Validity of knowledge): The authority of Vedic knowledge implies an omniscient source.

Śruteḥ (Scriptural testimony): Vedic revelations affirm the existence of Īśvara.

Vākyaṭ (Sentential structure): The structured nature of the Vedas indicates an intelligent author.

Saṃkhyā-viśeṣāt (Numerical order): Cosmic order and numerical relations imply a guiding intelligence.

² Nyāyakusumāñjali, 17, P-39

³ Nyāyamañjarī-5/1, P-175

Thus, both perception and inference support the existence of Īśvara. Yogically accomplished beings, through heightened perception, are said to directly realize this truth:

*tadevaṃ kṣīṇadoṣāñāṃ dhyānāvhitā-cetasām |
nirmalaṃ sarvaviśayaṃ jñānaṃ bhavati yoginām ||⁴*

Scriptural testimony (śabda-pramāṇa) further confirms this doctrine. The Vedas declare Īśvara as the sole creator and sustainer of the universe:

*eko devaḥ sarvabhūteṣu gūḍhaḥ
dyāvābhūmī janayan deva ekaḥ⁵*

Similarly, the Bhagavadgītā proclaims:

pitāham asya jagato mātā dhātā pitāmahaḥ⁶

“I am the father, mother, sustainer, and grandsire of the universe.”

On the basis of such reasoning and scriptural authority, philosophers like Jayanta Bhaṭṭa affirm that the existence of Īśvara—the supreme ruler, creator, and moral governor of the universe—is firmly established. Atheistic denials, grounded merely in fallacious reasoning, are therefore untenable.

Īśvara, as the omniscient, omnipotent, and all-governing reality, is established through perception, inference, and scriptural testimony. He alone is the creator (kartā), sustainer (dhartā), and protector (goptā) of the entire cosmos.

On the basis of these arguments and evidences, Jayanta Bhaṭṭa and other ācāryas firmly conclude that Īśvara—the creator, regulator, and dispenser of the fruits of actions—is necessarily established as a real and ultimate principle. The specious reasoning of atheistic thinkers is insufficient to overturn this well-founded conclusion. As expressed in the following verse:

*tasmāt kutārikodgīta dūṣaṇābhāsa-vāraṇāt |
siddhas trilokya-nirmāṇa-nipuṇaḥ parameśvaraḥ ||⁷*

Thus, when fallacious objections are set aside, it becomes evident that the Supreme Lord—skilled in the creation of the three worlds—is definitively established as the omniscient, omnipotent creator, sustainer, and governor of the universe.

Bhāsarvajña, while discussing the twelve *prameyas*, classifies the first prameya, namely *ātman*, into two types: *paramātman* (Supreme Self) and *aparamātman* (individual self). This view is consistent with that of Gautama, who also implicitly includes Īśvara within the category of *ātman*, since the defining characteristics of the self (*ātmalakṣaṇa*) are applicable to Īśvara as well. From its earliest phase, the Nyāya system accepts the existence of Īśvara. This is reflected in the following sūtras of Gautama:

1. *īśvaraḥ kāraṇaṃ puruṣa-karmāphalyadarśanāt (4.1.19)*
2. *na, puruṣa-karmābhāve phalāniṣpatteḥ (4.1.20)*
3. *tatkāritvād ahetuḥ (4.1.21)*

The first and second sūtras present two opposing prima facie views (pūrvapakṣa), while the third establishes the Nyāya conclusion (siddhānta). The first sūtra reflects the standpoint of

⁴ *Nyāyakusumāñjali-17, P-213*

⁵ *Śvetāśvataropaniṣad-6/11*

⁶ *Bhagavadgītā-9/19*

⁷ *Nyāyamañjarī-P-187*

strict theism, according to which Īśvara is the independent cause of the world, irrespective of karma. The second sūtra presents the view of the Mīmāṃsakas and other karmavādī thinkers, who argue that without the actions of living beings, no results can arise; therefore, Īśvara cannot be regarded as the cause of creation—rather, unseen forces (dharma and adharma) generated by actions are responsible.

After presenting these two positions, Gautama clarifies in the third sūtra that the reasons offered by both sides are not ultimately sufficient. This is because both human actions and their results are governed by Īśvara. Hence, neither Īśvara alone nor karma alone can be considered the sole cause. Rather, both—karma and Īśvara—together function as instrumental causes (nimitta-kāraṇa) in the process of creation.

The Nyāya-sūtra states: “*icchā-dveṣa-prayatna-sukha-duḥkha-jñānādy-ātma liṅgam*” (Nyāya-sūtra 1.1.10), indicating that desire, aversion, effort, pleasure, pain, and cognition are the marks of the self. Further, in the commentary on Nyāya-sūtra 4.1.21, it is stated: “*guṇa-viśiṣṭam ātmāntaram īśvaraḥ, tasya ātmakalpāt kalpāntarānupapattiḥ*”, meaning that Īśvara is a distinct self qualified by unique attributes, and no alternative conception apart from this is tenable.

Although in the case of *paramātman*, undesirable qualities such as aversion (*dveṣa*) and suffering (*duḥkha*) are entirely absent, Bhāsarvajña does not accept their potential inherence (*phalopadhāyaka-yogyatā*) in Him. Instead, he accepts only a *svarūpa-yogyatā*—a compatibility at the level of essential nature.

Īśvara's Characteristics According to Bhāsarvajña-

Bhāsarvajña defines Īśvara as follows: “*tatra paramātmā bhagavān maheśvaraḥ; tasya lakṣaṇam paramaiśvarya-viśiṣṭatvam, saṁsāra-dharmair rāga-dveṣa-moha-duḥkhādibhir anādy-asamprṣṭatvam, anādi-sarvajñatvam, sakala-jagad-vidhātṛtvaṁ ca.*”⁸ Thus, among the two types of selves, *paramātman* is identified with Bhagavān Maheśvara. His characteristics include: being endowed with supreme lordship (*paramaiśvarya*), being untouched since beginningless time by worldly attributes such as attachment, aversion, delusion, and suffering, possessing eternal omniscience, and being the creator of the entire universe.

By identifying *paramātman* with Maheśvara, Bhāsarvajña reveals his inclination toward the Pāsupata sect. Although Naiyāyikas were generally aligned with Śaiva traditions, Bhāsarvajña's conception appears particularly influenced by the Pāsupata tradition, especially considering his authorship of the *Gaṇakārikā*. The author of the *Nyāyabhūṣaṇa* further establishes a strong conception of a personal Īśvara (*śivatattva*), more emphatically than earlier thinkers—a fact also evident from the invocatory verses of the text.

In essence, Bhāsarvajña systematizes the definition of Īśvara already present in the works of Vātsyāyana. According to Vātsyāyana, Īśvara is a distinct self characterized by the absence of *adharma*, *mithyājñāna*, and *pramāda*, and by the presence of *dharma*, true knowledge, and meditative attainment (*samādhi*). The eight supernatural powers (*aṇimādy-aṣṭavidha-aiśvarya*) arise as the fruits of His *dharma* and *samādhi*.

Vātsyāyana further explains: “*adharma-mithyājñāna-pramāda-hānyā dharma-jñāna-samādhi-sampadā ca viśiṣṭam ātmāntaram īśvaraḥ; tasya ca dharma-samādhi-phalam aṇimādy-aṣṭavidham aiśvaryam; saṅkalpānuvadhāyī cāsya dharmah pratyātma-vṛttīn*

⁸ *Nyāyabhūṣaṇa -P-447*

dharmādharmasañcayān pṛthivyādīni ca bhūtāni pravartayati."⁹ Thus, the will (*sañkalpa*) of Īśvara generates *dharma*, which in turn governs the accumulation of merit and demerit in individual selves and initiates the activity of the elements such as earth.

Although yogins may also attain powers like *aṇimā*, the distinction lies in the eternality of Īśvara's lordship. This eternal nature of *aiśvarya* constitutes *paramaiśvarya*. The phrase "*saṁsāra-dharmair anādy-asamspṛṣṭatvam*" further confirms that Īśvara is never touched by worldly conditions, thereby establishing the permanence of His lordship.

This conception closely parallels the definition of Īśvara in the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali: "*kleśa-karma-vipākāśayair aparāmrṣṭaḥ puruṣa-viśeṣa īśvaraḥ*" (Yoga-sūtra 1.24), where Īśvara is described as a special puruṣa untouched by afflictions, actions, their results, and latent impressions.

Both Nyāya and Yoga thus converge in presenting Īśvara as a distinct, eternally *Mukta* (liberated), omniscient, and omnipotent being. Unlike liberated souls, who were once bound, Īśvara is eternally free and never subject to bondage—past, present, or future.

Through mere contemplation (*abhidhyāna*), Īśvara initiates motion in atoms and thereby creates the universe. Hence, He is the creator of all existence (*sakala-jagad-vidhātā*). Following the Nyāya method, Bhāsarvajña also establishes the existence of Īśvara through inference (*anumāna*): since such a complex and ordered universe cannot be produced by a limited and imperfect agent, one must infer an omniscient and omnipotent creator. Thus, the definition of Īśvara is established concisely yet systematically.

The references to Īśvara in the *Nyāyasūtra* are quite unclear and sparse. In the first *āhnika* of the fourth chapter, from the nineteenth to the twenty-first sūtras, some indications regarding Īśvara are found. Apart from these three sūtras, no explicit discussion of Īśvara occurs elsewhere in the Nyāya system. While discussing various theories of creation, the sūtrakāra states: "*īśvaraḥ kāraṇam puruṣa-karmā-phalyadarśanāt*"—Īśvara is the cause, because it is observed that human actions do not always produce their expected results.

Explaining this, the commentator introduces an opposing view with "*atha apara āha*". The objection is then stated: "*na puruṣa-karmābhāve phalāniṣpattiḥ*"—If results depend entirely on Īśvara, then they should arise even in the absence of human effort. The reply follows: "*tatkāritvād ahetuḥ*"—This objection is invalid, since the role of human action as a cause cannot be denied.

According to Vātsyāyana, Īśvara is defined as: "*guṇa-viśiṣṭam ātmāntaram īśvaraḥ*"—Īśvara is a distinct self endowed with specific attributes. Thus, in Nyāya, the self is considered twofold: *jīvātman* (individual self) and *paramātman* (Supreme Self). Viśvanātha Nyāyapañcānana, in his commentary, notes an alternative interpretation: "*anen brahma-pariṇāma-vādo brahma-vivarta-vādo vā darśitaḥ*"—Some hold that these sūtras imply either the doctrine of transformation (*pariṇāma*) or apparent modification (*vivarta*) of Brahman. Another interpretation states: "*pare tu prasaṅgād īśvara-pratipādanāya tri-sūtrī*"—These three sūtras aim to establish Īśvara as the causal principle.

Although such interpretations create ambiguity, Nyāya cannot be regarded as atheistic. In fact, Vātsyāyana explicitly describes Īśvara as the father of all beings, the seer (*draṣṭā*), the knower (*bodhā*), and omniscient (*sarvajña*). The Veda is also accepted as authoritative because it is regarded as originating from Īśvara.

⁹ *Nyāya-sūtra* 4.1.21

Udayanacharya composed the *Nyāyakusumāñjali* specifically to establish the existence of Īśvara. He describes Īśvara as: “*īśvaro 'yaṁ nirādhāraḥ sarvajñaḥ sarvaśaktimān, anādir avikārī cānantaḥ sarvagato vibhuḥ*”¹⁰—Īśvara is without dependence, omniscient, omnipotent, beginningless, immutable, infinite, and all-pervasive. Further, “*saccidānanda-rūpo 'pi dayāluḥ dharmyaṁ yatatparaḥ, sarge sthitau laye hetuḥ*”—He is of the nature of existence-consciousness-bliss, compassionate, devoted to righteousness, and the cause of creation, sustenance, and dissolution.

Comparative Perspectives- Most Indian philosophical systems accept the existence of Īśvara, and the attainment of the four *puruṣārthas*—*dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa*—is considered dependent upon His grace. Different schools interpret Īśvara in different ways:

- Advaita Vedānta: Īśvara is pure, conscious, and liberated by nature.
- Sāṅkhya: Īśvara is associated with powers such as *aṇimā* and *mahimā*.
- Yoga: “*kleśa-karma-vipākāśayair aparāmrṣṭaḥ puruṣa-viśeṣa īśvaraḥ*”— Īśvara is a special *puruṣa* untouched by afflictions, actions, and their results.
- Shaivism: Śiva is Īśvara.
- Vaishnavism: Viṣṇu is regarded as the Supreme Being.
- Mīmāṃsā: sacred mantras are treated as divine.
- Cārvāka: worldly rulers are metaphorically called Īśvara.

In Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Īśvara is accepted as a *puruṣa-viśeṣa* (special self), the creator of the three worlds, blissful and compassionate, and entirely free from afflictions and karmic limitations. The self is divided into *jīvātman* and *paramātman*. The difference lies in this: in the individual self, knowledge, desire, and effort are non-eternal, whereas in Īśvara they are eternal. Hence: “*nitya-jñānādhikaraṇam īśvaraḥ*”—Īśvara is the substratum of eternal knowledge.

Īśvara is also regarded as the dispenser of the fruits of actions: “*īśvaraḥ kāraṇam puruṣa-karmā-phalyadarśanāt*”. Explaining this, Vātsyāyana states that human effort does not always yield results; therefore, it is inferred that the fruition of actions depends on a higher principle—Īśvara. He further adds: “*puruṣakāram īśvaro 'nugrḥṇāti*”—Īśvara assists human effort and brings about its results. Īśvara possesses the eight supernatural powers (*aṇimā*, *laghimā*, etc.), which are absent in ordinary beings. He governs the operation of merit and demerit in all selves and directs the elements: “*pratyātma-vṛttīn dharmādharmasañcayān pṛthivyādīni ca bhūtāni pravartayati.*”

Īśvara is self-sufficient and benevolent, like a father who acts selflessly for his children. However, His grace is bestowed upon those who follow scriptural injunctions: “*tasmāc chāstram pramāṇam te kāryākārya-vyavasthitau.*”¹¹ Thus, Īśvara is omniscient, omnipotent, and the creator of the universe. Knowledge, will, and effort are eternal in Him. As the author of the Vedas, He must know their meanings completely. He is also the knower of all actions of all beings and the supporter of human pursuits. Finally, Udayanacharya remarks: “*svargāpavargayor mārgam mananti manīṣiṇaḥ, yad upāsate sa eva paramātmā*”—That which the wise worship as the path to heaven and liberation is indeed the Supreme Self.

¹⁰ *Nyāyakusumāñjali*-5/17

¹¹ *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*-17/1

Īśvarasiddhi- Following the tradition of Nyāya philosophy, Bhāsarvajña establishes the existence of Īśvara on the basis of two pramāṇas—*anumāna* (inference) and *āgama* (scriptural testimony). Since the proof of Īśvara through *āgama* is comparatively brief in contrast to inference, it is first presented according to the *sūcīkaṭāha-nyāya*.

Bhāsarvajña cites both *śruti* and *smṛti* texts to establish Īśvara as the creator of the universe. A few representative citations, following the *sthālī-pulāka-nyāya*, are as follows:

1. “*eko rudraḥ na dvitīyaḥ*” — Taittirīya Saṁhitā 1/8/6
2. “*yaḥ sūrya iva imāl lokān īśate īśanībhiḥ*” — Bāṭukopaniṣad 22
3. “*dyāvābhūmī janayan deva ekaḥ*” — Śvetāśvataropaniṣad 3/3
4. “*etasya cākṣasya praśāsane gārgi, dyāvā-pṛthivī vidhr̥te tiṣṭhataḥ*” — Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad 3/8/9
5. “*praśāsītāraṁ sarveṣāṁ aṅyāṁsam aṅor api, rukmābham svapna-dhī-gamyam vidyāt taṁ puruṣam param*” — Manusmṛti 12/120
6. “*eṣa sarvāṇi bhūtāni pañcabhir vyāpya mūrtibhiḥ, janma-vṛddhi-kṣayair nityam sambhrāmayati cakravat*” — Manusmṛti 12/124

Here, the author of the *Nyāyabhūṣaṇa* presents an objection raised by the Mīmāṁsakas as the *pūrvapakṣa* and proceeds to refute it. According to Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and other Mīmāṁsakas, the above Vedic statements that describe Īśvara as the creator of the universe are merely *arthavāda* (eulogistic or explanatory statements). Hence, they should not be taken as conveying factual truth but only as supportive of ritual injunctions, since the entire Veda is intended to promote sacrificial activity (*yajña*). Therefore, such Brahman-related statements are not meant for liberation (*mokṣa*), but only to encourage ritual action.

Refuting this view, Bhāsarvajña argues that the Mīmāṁsakas themselves accept the validity of Vedic statements that describe the nature (*svarūpa*) of entities. Just as statements describing heaven, hell, etc., are considered valid, so too should statements describing the nature of Īśvara be accepted as valid means of knowledge. Without knowledge of the nature of an object, one cannot determine whether it is to be accepted (*upādāna*) or rejected (*parihāra*). Such determination alone leads to activity (*pravṛtti*) or withdrawal (*nivṛtti*). Therefore, statements revealing the nature of reality must also be accepted as valid (*pramāṇa*).

Moreover, it is not necessary that a sentence must explicitly contain an injunction or prohibition to produce action or cessation. For example, the statement “*śaśa-śṛṅga atyanta upayogī hotā hai*” (a hare’s horn is extremely useful) contains neither injunction nor prohibition, yet one who knows that a hare’s horn is unreal will not act upon it. Similarly, statements describing the nature of Īśvara inspire the pursuit of knowledge of the Supreme Self.

Hence, such statements should not be treated as *arthavāda*, but as *svarūpa-pratipādaka* (revealing essential nature) and *sad-artha-pratipādaka* (conveying real meaning). Their literal meaning is valid, and they cannot be otherwise interpreted.

Self-knowledge (*ātmañāna*) cannot be regarded as merely instrumental for ritual action; rather, it is meant for liberation. Bhāsarvajña supports this by arguing that once the authority of the Veda is established, ritual activity can proceed on the basis of injunctions such as *agnihotra* alone. Therefore, self-knowledge cannot be considered an independent motivator of ritual action.

If the authority of the Veda is uncertain, then even self-knowledge cannot generate ritual activity. Thus, it is clear that statements concerning self-knowledge cannot be causally linked to ritual action. On the contrary, many *śruti* statements explicitly support the view that self-knowledge leads to liberation:

1. “*vedāham etaṁ puruṣaṁ mahāntam āditya-varṇaṁ tamaśaḥ parastāt*”¹²
2. “*tam eva viditvā atimṛtyum eti nānyaḥ panthā vidyate 'yanāya*”¹³

There are no *śruti* statements establishing that such knowledge leads to ritual activity. Hence, the Mīmāṃsā position is contrary to scripture. Although statements about self-knowledge and those about liberation do not always occur together in a single context, their connection can be established through the *maṇḍūka-pluṭi-nyāya*. Just as the injunction “*yāvajjīvam agnihotraṁ juhuyāt*” is connected with its result mentioned elsewhere, similarly, statements describing Brahman can be connected with those describing liberation. In this regard, a principle stated in the Bhāṭṭa tradition is relevant: “*yasya yena artha-sambandho dūrasthasyāpi tasya saḥ, arthataḥ samarthānām ānantaryam akāraṇam*”—A relation between two meanings can be established even if they are textually distant, provided they are logically connected. From the above discussion, it is clear that Vedic statements describing Īśvara are valid in their literal sense and function as means of true knowledge. Therefore, they cannot be reinterpreted otherwise. Since knowledge of the Supreme Self is indispensable for liberation, it is necessary to engage in *śravaṇa* (hearing), *manana* (reflection), and *nididhyāsana* (deep contemplation) of such statements that reveal the nature of Īśvara.

Methods of Proof: Pramāṇas (Anumāna (Inference) & Āgama (Scriptural Testimony)-

In the proof of Īśvara, the *anumāna* pramāṇa (inference) is extremely important because it provides the sole logical basis for the existence of Īśvara as the creator of the universe. Even *āgama* pramāṇa, particularly the authority of the Vedas, rests to some extent on faith. It should be noted that in Nyāya philosophy, the Veda is considered the word of the omniscient Īśvara, and thus its authority depends on Īśvara being established. Accepting the authority of the Veda prior to proving Īśvara leads to mutual dependency (*anyonya-āśraya-doṣa*). Until Īśvara and His omniscience are established, the authority of the Veda remains doubtful.

Furthermore, for opponents such as atheists, Buddhists, and others who reject the authority of the Veda, inference is the only means through which the existence of Īśvara can be established. Following previous scholars such as Udyotakara, Bhūṣaṅakāra establishes the proof of Īśvara in **two stages**. In the first stage, the creator is inferred as a *general conscious principle*; in the second stage, the *specific conscious agent* is identified. This is explained sequentially as follows:

To establish that a general conscious principle (*cetan-sāmānya*) is the creator of the world, Bhāsarvajña provides the following inference statement: “*vivādādhyāsitam, upalabdhimat-kāraṇam, abhūtva bhāvitvāt, vastrādivat.*” Although this inference resembles those of other Nyāya philosophers, it has its unique characteristics. To clarify, the inference statements of earlier scholars for proving Īśvara are cited chronologically:

1. Udyotakara: “*pradhāna-paramāṇu-karmāṇi prāk-pravṛtter buddhimat-kāraṇa-ādhiṣṭhitāni pravartante, achetanatvāt, vāsyādivat.*”¹⁴

¹² Śvetāśvataropaniṣad-3/7

¹³ Śvetāśvataropaniṣad-3/7

¹⁴ Nyāyadarśana.P-945

2. Bhāsarvajña: “*vivādādhyāsitam, upalabdhimat-kāraṇam, abhūtvā bhāvītvāt, vastrādivat.*”¹⁵
3. Vācaspati Mīśra: “*vivādādhyāsītāstarumahī-dhārādī upādānābhijñakartṛkā, utpattimatvāt achetanopādānatvādvā yathā prasādādi.*”¹⁶
4. Viśvanātha: “*kṣityādikaṁ, sakartṛkaṁ, kāryatvāt, ghaṭavat.*”¹⁷

These inference statements show the progressive development of the logical procedure for proving Īśvara. While Udyotakara's inference aligns with the Nyāya system, it fails to satisfy the Mīmāṃsakas. According to Mīmāṃsā, creation is eternal; thus, the initiation of creation through atomic aggregation is meaningless in their view. Possibly keeping this in mind, Bhāsarvajña presents his inference differently. The term *vivādādhyāsitam* avoids reference to specific entities like *kṣityaṅkura* and instead signals that the world consists of entities whose causal authorship is disputed—not the eternal atoms or space. Vācaspati Mīśra explicitly distinguishes three kinds of *bhāva-dravya* (material entities) in the world:

1. Entities whose conscious agents are known (e.g., prasāda, gopura).
2. Entities whose conscious agents are unknown (e.g., atoms, space).
3. Entities whose conscious agents are doubtful (e.g., trees, mountains).

Due to the lack of reliable instruments of proof or uncertainty of the agent, doubt arises regarding the conscious creation of such entities. According to Vātsyāyana, inference is permitted only where doubt exists: “*nānuplabdhé na nirñīta-arthé nyāyaḥ pravartate, kiṁ tarhi, samśayité arthé.*”

Additionally, the phrase *abhūtvā bhāvītvāt* functions as the reason (*hetu*) instead of *kāryatvāt*. Although similar, Bhāsarvajña uses *abhūtvā bhāvītvāt* purposefully: Mīmāṃsakas do not recognize the world as an effect (*kārya*), so reasoning via *kāryatva* would fail for them. Using *abhūtvā bhāvītvāt*, Bhāsarvajña establishes that, even if the world is not an effect, at least it was non-existent and then came into existence—a notion they will accept. In Vācaspati's inference statement, both reasons from Udyotakara and Bhāsarvajña are incorporated, showing the development of the logical procedure for proving Īśvara.

The above inference demonstrates the causal role of a general conscious principle (*cetan-sāmānya*) in creation. An objection might be raised that the example *vastrādi* does not prove conscious causation, as it is performed using inanimate fibers. However, this objection is baseless: even the inanimate fibers are moved by a conscious being, and hence its causation is recognized. The agent is always independent; the inanimate medium follows the conscious will. Without the conscious agent, even inanimate matter could not produce artifacts. Thus, causation rightly belongs to the conscious agent.

Once the general conscious principle is established, the question arises: which specific conscious agent among innumerable conscious beings created the world? According to Bhāsarvajña, the procedure is analogous to identifying an artist of a painting or composer of a poem from the work itself. The crucial aspect here is the method of **elimination (*pariśeṣa*)**: by progressively excluding improbable candidates, the remaining being is determined as the agent (*pariśeṣa-pramāna*): “*prasakta-pratiśedhe 'nyatrāprasṅgāc chiṣyamāṇe sampra-tyayaḥ pariśeṣaḥ.*” The world's distinctiveness is evident in its complex, ordered structures

¹⁵ Nyāyasāra, P-47

¹⁶ Nyāyadarśana, P-953

¹⁷ Nyāyadarśana, P-954

comprising both animate and inanimate entities: mountains, rivers, oceans, stars, seasons, and years—all are highly regulated and varied. Only a conscious agent endowed with supreme power and knowledge of the means (*upādāna*) can create such a complex world. The process of elimination thus identifies the specific conscious agent as Īśvara.

For example, smoke indicates fire, but the specific type of fire (e.g., from straw or wood) can be inferred only from the particular characteristics of the smoke. Similarly, from the distinct features of the universe, one can infer attributes of its creator, such as omnipotence (*nitya-aishvaryatva*), omniscience (*nitya-sarvajñatva*), and all-powerfulness. Vedic statements or personal reasoning then label this specific conscious agent as Īśvara, Bhagavān, or Lord. Although Udyotakara and others also present this process, Bhūṣaṇakāra's exposition is exceptionally detailed and systematic.

Objection (Pūrvapakṣa): Kumārila Bhaṭṭa objected to inferring a specific agent, arguing that the example *ghaṭādi* refers to the potter, not Īśvara; thus the exemplar lacks the intended object (*sādhya*). Even if both the potter and Īśvara are considered, only Īśvara is the *sādhya*, so the objection persists. Moreover, since the potter is finite, mortal, and worldly, the inferred agent for earth or pots would also be finite, making the reason *abhūtvā bhāvitvāt* inappropriate. **Reply (Uttarapakṣa):** Bhūṣaṇakāra clarifies that the inference only identifies a general intelligent agent. Once the general intelligent agent is accepted as the *sādhya*, objections regarding the exemplar do not arise. Concerning the specific notion of Īśvara, it is not appropriate to reject the exemplar for not directly showing the intended object. The *sādhya* of inference is always the general object of knowledge (*arthaviśeṣa*). Particulars are only for illustration. Just as smoke on a mountain indicates fire, the type of fire may remain general; likewise, the potter example illustrates intelligent causation without affecting the validity of the inference. Thus, the process of inference presented by Bhāsarvajña for proving Īśvara is logically robust and free from objection.

Purpose of Ishvara's Activity- What is the purpose of Ishvara in the operation of the entire cosmic order? This question has been the subject of deep reflection in Indian philosophy since ancient times. On one hand, Mimamsakas, Buddhists, and other non-theists have criticized the notion of a purposeful activity of Ishvara and denied His existence, whereas on the other hand, theistic systems like Nyaya and Vedanta have presented various ideas regarding Ishvara's purpose.

The uniqueness of Bhasarvajn lies in the fact that he included, in his *Nyayabhushana*, many views on this topic that existed up to his time. If the nectar of philosophical reflection on the purpose of Ishvara could be found in a single source, it would undoubtedly be Bhasarvajn's *Nyayabhushana*. In this section, the non-theistic views of Mimamsakas and Buddhists are first presented as the *purvapaks*, followed by the exposition of the *siddhantpaks*.

If Ishvara is the creator of the world, there must be some purpose behind the creation, for: "*Prayojanam anuddishya na mando'pi pravartate.*" Activity cannot be conceived without any purpose, because this would compromise Ishvara's wisdom.

Some scholars have accepted that Ishvara's activity is for play or amusement. However, this is not appropriate, because even play is undertaken for enjoyment. If Ishvara's activity is assumed to be for play, His *apta-kamatva* (perfectly fulfilled will) would be contradicted. Who, then, would tolerate the suffering involved in the creation of such a vast and extraordinary world? Prajnakaragupta, supporting Kumarila, also rejects the notion of play as the purpose of Ishvara.

According to him, if Ishvara's activity were for amusement, His actions could not be considered rational. Just as one person's hunting game may bring momentary satisfaction but cause the death of another being, Ishvara might enjoy creation while living beings suffer. Prajnakaragupta here also points to the problem of evil in the world.

Bhasarvajñ considers Ishvara's activity to be purposeful (*saprayojan*). According to him, there are three possible purposes of Ishvara's activity: (k) **Pararthavashat**, (kh) **Svartthavashat**, and (g) **Swabhavavashat**. Bhushankar has demonstrated the correctness of all three, which are described as follows:

Pararthavashat Pravritti

According to this view, the compassionate Ishvara acts for the benefit of living beings. Since He cannot show grace without first creating beings, their bodies, and senses, He first creates them.

Pūrvapakṣa: This view raises several doubts. First, why does a compassionate Ishvara allow suffering in the world? Just as a physician, though compassionate, may use painful remedies to cure diseases, Ishvara allows suffering to remove the evil-doing (*adharm*) of beings. This is problematic, because even without Ishvara's activity, such problems could be solved. Second, why does He motivate humans toward *adharm*? When He causes beings to perform unjust actions, how can His activity be considered purposeful?

Moreover, Ishvara is called the author of all scriptures (*sakalashastrakarta*). If He teaches both truth and falsehood, His credibility is compromised. An Ishvara devoid of attachment should remain indifferent rather than causing suffering or encouraging evil. If Ishvara acts to destroy *adharm* by prompting beings to act unjustly, evil could never be eliminated, because a wise being does not act toward futile work.

Uttarpakṣa: According to Bhasarvajñ, the objection that Ishvara causes suffering is unfounded. Ishvara's causal role in the universe is not unconditional but depends on karmas. Just as a potter uses clay and tools to produce a pot, Ishvara creates the universe based on karmas. The inequality of pleasure and suffering in the world is due to karma, not Ishvara.

Through the varying desires of beings, karmas differ. As the existence of Ishvara is inferred from the extraordinary work of creation, the existence of karma is inferred from the variety in births of beings. Although this idea was present in earlier Nyaya philosophy, Shankaracharya's influence is also visible here ("*Vaishamyairmritye cha sapekshat tatha hi darshayati*" – *Brahmasutra* 2/1/34).

Bhasarvajñ further explains that *pararthavashat* activity means: if someone acts to achieve what another desires, that activity is *pararth* (for others). Due to the varied desires of beings, Ishvara, in fulfilling their desires, may cause unavoidable suffering. According to *Prameyamimamsa*, pleasure is impossible without experiencing some suffering. If a being sometimes follows the path of liberation through disinterested action, Ishvara, according to their needs, facilitates the requisite worldly and spiritual conditions, enabling liberation.

Even though this explanation addresses objections, the charge of Ishvara's teaching falsehoods remains. Bhasarvajñ clarifies that not all scriptures are directly authored by Ishvara. The Vedas are authentic due to their truthfulness, but Ishvara also allows beings to compile scriptures over time, which may include the consequences of unseen factors (*adrishta*). Therefore, Ishvara is called the author of all scriptures (*sakalashastrakarta*), but this does not make Him a false teacher.

Swarthavashat Pravritti

Bhasarvajñ demonstrates Ishvara's activity as self-directed (*swarthavashat*) with his exceptional insight. He presents a new interpretation of the word *prayojan* (purpose).

An activity is purposeful if it is done to achieve what the agent desires. Just as humans act for pleasure or the removal of suffering because they desire these outcomes, Ishvara acts in creation because the universe is highly desirable to Him. Thus, creation itself is Ishvara's own purpose.

Although some may argue that *swarthavashat* contradicts Ishvara's *apta-kamatva*, Bhasarvajñ counters this by redefining *apta-kam*: a desire that is fulfilled is *apta-kam*. Since Ishvara's creation achieves His purpose, He is considered fully fulfilled.

Swabhavavashat Pravritti

Just as the sun naturally illuminates the world, and beings experience pleasure and pain according to their actions, Ishvara naturally governs the universe, and beings experience results according to their karmas.

Though some may question His wisdom if creation is purely natural, Bhasarvajñ uses an elegant analogy: just as a wise person performs actions like breaking grass without ulterior motives, Ishvara acts according to His natural disposition.

Even with perfect knowledge and power, Ishvara, seeing the presence of suitable unseen causes (*adrishtadi*), creates the universe. This does not compromise His freedom, as freedom entails skillfully utilizing available causes, not ignoring them.

Bhasarvajñ thus integrates various viewpoints and establishes the threefold purpose of Ishvara: **paraartha**, **swartha**, and **swabhava**.

Unity of Ishvara- According to Bhasarvajñ, the creator of the entire universe is one Maheshvara, who is omniscient (*sarvajña*), omnipotent (*sarvashaktiman*), and omnipresent (*sarvavyapi*). In *Nyayabhushana*, Bhushankar demonstrates the unity of the world-creator through two methods:

Numerous statements advocating Ishvara's unity are cited in *Nyayabhushana*. Notable statements from the Sthali-pulak Nyaya include:

1. “*Eko rudah na dvitiyah*” (Taittiriya Samhita 1/8/6)
2. “*Dyavabhoomi janayandeva ekah*” (Shvetashvatara Upanishad 3/3)

There are many difficulties in imagining multiple Ishvaras. If all such Ishvaras possess supreme powers (*parmaishvaryadi dharma*), what advantage is gained from multiple Ishvaras? One Ishvara is sufficient for creation. If we do not grant supreme powers to multiple creators, then the weaker Ishvaras must have their own controllers, which leads to disputes regarding creation.

Bhushankar's reasoning here shows a clear influence of Yoga philosophy: “*Kleshakarma-vipakashayairaparamrishtah purushavishesah Ishvarah*” (Yoga Sutra 1/24, Vyasa Bhashya). According to Vyasa Bhashya, no other being can have Ishvara's equal power, because contradictory intentions regarding the same object would invalidate one another, causing a deficiency in sovereignty.

Prajnakaragupta raised the objection that multiple non-Ishvaras (*ani-shvaras*) could be imagined as creators, as in the world one sees many causes producing one effect and one cause producing many effects. Bhushankar clarified that the independence of the agent is

essential. The being who uses causes like materials (*upadana*) but remains unaffected by them is the true independent creator. Non-Ishvaras cannot use the visible causes like earth, mountains, and bodies with foresight; controlled by unseen causes, they lack freedom. Even multiple non-Ishvaras cannot create this extraordinary universe, just as a nursing infant cannot. From this discussion, the unity of Ishvara as the world-creator is established.

Anadi Sarvajnatva of Ishvara - Bhasarvajn uses the term *anadi-sarvajnatva* (eternal omniscience) as a characteristic of Ishvara. A characteristic denotes an extraordinary property of a substance, distinguishing it from other substances. Therefore, eternal omniscience exists only in Ishvara and nowhere else. Though the supreme knowledge of yogis may sometimes be recognized, it cannot be called *anadi*. Before attaining omniscience, they have limited knowledge. Hence, only Ishvara possesses knowledge that is eternal and beginningless.

In Nyaya terms, Ishvara is the unique self in which knowledge of all objects is eternally present. The term *anadi-sarvajnatva* reveals two points:

1. Ishvara is omniscient (*sarvajna*)—His knowledge encompasses all objects.
2. Ishvara's knowledge is eternal, uninterrupted across past, present, and future.

The basis for inferring Ishvara's omniscience is the same as that used to establish His existence: the creation of infinite substances in a complex universe is impossible without knowledge of causes like materials (*upadana-adi*).

Pūrvapakṣa: To refute Ishvara's omniscience, Kumarila argued against Buddhists, claiming that if no one is omniscient in the present, then omniscience in the past is also impossible: "*Atitaḥ kālah sarvajñā-shunyah, kālatvat, adyatvat*". He also questioned how a limited-knower could infer omniscience. **Uttarpakṣa:** Just as one who does not know scriptures can infer another's scriptural knowledge from their actions or authoritative statements, a non-omniscient being can infer Ishvara's omniscience. If someone ignorant of scripture did not recognize another's knowledge, they could not learn from them. Ishvara's omniscience is eternal and supported by multiple *agama* statements.

Some examples include:

1 "*Nityam parameshvara-jnanam, gandha-dharma-dhvani-samavayi-karana-arthantara-nitya-dvya-visheshā-gunatvat, toya-adi-paramanu-rupadvat*".¹⁸ Explanation: *Gandha* (smell), *adharmā*, and *dhvani* are causally linked to earth, non-self, and space, respectively. The particular qualities of eternal substances act as causes. The qualities of things like water are impermanent because their substrates are impermanent.

2. "*Nityam parameshvara-jnanam, kshit-akasha-samsari-purushanashritatve sati nitya-dravya-visheshā-gunatvachchalila-di-paramanu-rupadvat*".¹⁹ Objection: Ishvara's effort and intention here may seem contradictory. Answer: Ishvara's intention and effort accept the eternality of these substances.

3. "*Nitya-jnana-ashrayo Bhagavan, niratisaya-kartṛtvat, vaidharmya-drishtanto smadadi*".²⁰ This inference uses a purely consequential (*kevalavyatireki*) method. Objection: Buddhists may claim the attribute *nitya-jnana-ashraya* is unestablished. Answer: In any *kevalavyatireki* inference, the subject's attribute is by nature unestablished, because the *sadhya* (thing to be proved) exists nowhere except in the subject.

¹⁸ *Nyāyasāra-P-57*

¹⁹ *Nyāyasāra-P-957*

²⁰ *Nyāyasāra-P-58*

Through these three independent inferences, Bhasarvajñ establishes Ishvara's eternal knowledge. Consequently, the eternity of Ishvara is also established, because the support of knowledge must itself be eternal. Bhasarvajñ also provides another strong reasoning for eternal omniscience. Based on previous arguments, Ishvara lacks physical organs (*sharira-indriya-adi*), which proves the eternity of His knowledge: "*Tadevam jnanotpadaka-hetoh sharirader-abhaavan nityameva jnanam Bhagavatah*" ²¹. Many *agama* statements also support this, e.g.:

1. "*Na tasya karya karanam cha*" (Śvetāśvataropaniṣad 3/8)
2. "*Apani-padah*" (Śvetāśvataropaniṣad 3/19)

These prove not only the uncreated and eternal nature of Ishvara's knowledge, but also His will and effort. **Pūrvapakṣa:** If one assumes Ishvara has a physical body, His eternal knowledge would be compromised. **Uttarpakṣa:** Subtle functions like blood circulation are explained without assuming a body. Eternal organs cannot be assumed because there is no evidence; even eternal atoms cannot be Ishvara's body. Ishvara, being complete, has nothing to enjoy. The *agama* statements that describe Ishvara's body are to be understood as figurative (*upachara-prayoga*), not literal. Just as a devotee's body represents his will, the universe represents Ishvara's will; the body itself is not literal. Thus, Ishvara is devoid of body and sense organs, ensuring the uncreated and eternal nature of His knowledge.

Directness of Ishvara's Knowledge: Ishvara's sovereignty is absolute, so His knowledge relates to past, present, and future objects. Bhushankar explains this with the example of yogic perception. The use of perceptual terms for divine knowledge is figurative: just as a person sees their palm clearly, Ishvara sees all objects across three times vividly. Even though His knowledge is not dependent on organs, perceptual language is used for convenience. Thus, the unmediated nature (*aproksha*) ensures Ishvara's eternal knowledge.

Conclusion-

In Nyāya philosophy, Īśvara is a distinct, omniscient, omnipotent Supreme Self, the creator, sustainer, and regulator of the universe. Both inference and scriptural testimony establish His existence. Īśvara's eternal knowledge, will, and effort make Him the ultimate moral governor and the object of meditation and liberation. The Nyāya framework, enriched by Bhāsarvajña, Udayanacharya, and earlier commentators, presents a coherent and systematic theistic philosophy consistent with Indian epistemology and soteriology.

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²¹ *Nyāyabhūṣaṇ-P-466*

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