The question whether an individual might be capable of having extraordinary cognitions (yogijñāna, yogipratyakṣa) up to the point of knowing everything (omniscience, sarvajñāna) is one of the most gripping problems South Asian philosophy has discussed over time. Although the issue is often examined from a purely epistemological perspective, it is easy to see how it also has strong religious and soteriological implications. In the end, accepting the possibility that enlightened persons are able to perceive what is beyond the purview of ordinary people entails their recognition as valid sources of knowledge. It is thus not surprising that in the South Asian context the most zealous defenders of the legitimacy of extraordinary knowledge are the Buddhists and the Jainas, whose doctrines are grounded on the insights of persons to whom extraordinary powers are granted. The situation in the Brahmanical world is, on the other hand, much more nuanced. In it one can find a more or less explicit acceptance of extraordinary cognitions alongside a neat repudiation of them, especially in those cases where the epistemic authority of the Vedic scriptures on transcendent affairs is stressed. The seminar focuses on the way the question is dealt with by the grammarian and philosopher Bhartṛhari (5th century CE), who was somehow capable of incorporating extraordinary cognitions into his system without harming the centrality of the Veda as a beginning-less and author-less source of knowledge.

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