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Nature and Means to Liberation after Śāṅkarācārya: An Investigation

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Abstract

Liberation or freedom from birth and death is accepted in general by all the philosophers of India. In the view of Śāṅkara, Liberation means the realization of the identity between the individual self and the Absolute. According to Advaita Vedānta, the self is of the nature of existence, consciousness and bliss. The self comes under bondage due to Avidyā or ignorance. The individual self erroneously identifies itself with the body- gross and subtle-because of ignorance and is subjected to sorrows and sufferings and continues to revolve in the cycle of birth and death. When Avidyā or ignorance is destroyed by true knowledge, the individual self identifies with the Absolute and realizes its intrinsic transcendental and absolute nature. The realization of the real nature of man is the ultimate human destiny. Man must strive for this realization The ultimate goal of all mankind, according to Vivekananda is “re-union with God”, or, what amounts to the same, with the divinity which is every man's true nature.

Keywords: *Vedānta, Māyā, Mukti, Brahman, Jīva*

1. Introduction

According to Advaita Vedānta, liberation means the realization of the real nature of the individual self as identical to Brahman. The knowledge of Brahman is the summum bonum or *parama- puruṣārtha* or *mokṣa* of life. The knowledge of Brahman destroys *avidyā* or ignorance which is the root cause of the cycle of birth and death. Liberation is not the production of anything new, nor is it the purification of any old state; it is the realization of what is always there, even in the stage of bondage, though not known then. For, liberation is nothing but the identity of the self and Brahman, which is always real, though not always recognized.¹

In the view of Citukhacārya, *mokṣa* is the realization of all bliss. Śāṅkara declares in many Writings that the nature of liberation is a state of the *Jīvas* oneness with Brahman. This is of the nature of unsurpassable bliss since the essence of Brahman is absolute bliss. Śāṅkara describes the nature of liberation as that which is absolutely real, immutable, eternal, all-pervading like *ākāśa*, free from all modifications, all-satisfying, partless, self-luminous, free from good or bad and their effects and devoid of all limitation of time-past, present and future— is called

liberation. Liberation as the realization of *ānandasvarupa* Brahman and absolute cessation of the agony of life.²

The Advaitins views that what we see in the world is covered by *Māyā*. We look at the material objects without seeing the *Parabrahman*. In our life, we see that the world is immovable/impermanent and it is always changing. We do not see fluid existence because of ignorance. The way to get rid of unconsciousness/ignorance is Liberation. Advaitin views that people are free from *Māyā* when they are attached to *Parabrahman*. For Advaitin, Liberation is self-realization or knowledge of the soul. When this knowledge is attained, people are not confident in *Māyā*. People are not covered by *avidyā*, then he is free from every type of bondage. He belongs to the top of everything. According to Advaitin, there is a need for four kinds of meditations for achieving self-realization, such as 1. Gaining accurate knowledge about the differences between the eternal and the non-eternal objects. 2. The inferiority of the life of the person and the next. 3. The inner and the outermost restraint and 4. The intense desire for freedom. By these four kinds of activities, the people realize that there is no difference between him and Brahma. He realizes that everything is Brahma or *Sarvam khalvidam brahma tajjalān iti śānta upāsita : Atha khalu kratumayaḥ puruṣo yathākraturasminiloke puruṣo bhavati tathetaḥ pretya bhavati, sa kratum kurvīta.*³

2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the proposed study are as follows:

1. Explain the nature of liberation after Śāṅkarācārya
2. Essential Characteristic of mokṣa
3. Means to liberation
4. Notion of Śravana, Manana and Nididhyāsana
5. The difference between Jīvanmukti and Vīdehamukti

3. Discussion

1. Nature of Liberation After Śāṅkarācārya

According to Śāṅkarācārya, the concept of liberation is not a matter of new attainment but the realization of that which is already with us. It is the realization of our own nature and not the attainment of anything that we do not possess already. The attainment of liberation is, therefore, compared by the Advaitins with the help of the analogies of day-to-day life. The attainment of liberation is like the search of the necklace which is already lying in the neck by one who forgot

its existence there and searches for it everywhere. Then a passerby, on being appraised of the situation, points out to the person that the necklace is there round his neck. Then the person grasps at the necklace and cries out saying, I have got back my necklace. Here, the person who attains it was the necklace, which was already with him. This is a case of attainment that is already attained. Here, the person has nothing to do for getting back the necklace. All that he needs to get is the knowledge of the fact that the necklace was not lost. Thus, liberation, in Śāṅkara's philosophy is characterized as the attainment of attains. Liberation is not merely the cessation of all misery and pain. It is nothing but the revelation of Brahman as a state of positive bliss, because, the essence of Brahman is bliss and liberation is identified with Brahman. In reality, the essential nature of self as bliss is concealed by ignorance. When this ignorance is destroyed by true knowledge, all pain disappears, and the eternal self of the nature of bliss manifests itself. Liberation, therefore, means the removal of ignorance by knowledge.

2. The Essential Characteristic of Mokṣa

The essential characteristic of *mokṣa* is freedom from *avidyā* (ignorance) and on the other hand from rebirth. According to Śāṅkara, removal of *avidyā* leads to *mokṣa* and it is the removal of causes leading to rebirth. The causes of rebirth are the resulting *karma*. The acquisition of *jñāna* (i.e., removal of *ajñāna*) is possible only when the all past *karmas* of an individual are annihilated. Since he has realized that he is Brahman, he has no selfish desires, which impel him to do selfish actions which produce results of *karma* (action). He has only *prārabdha karmas*, but he is not affected by them. Though his body is not dependent on any result of *karma* it may continue to do its normal function, just as a potter's wheel goes on revolving for some time even after the staff stick is withdrawn. His body may last till the *prārabdha karmas* demand it.

In Brahma-Sūtra it is stated that...

mukta pratijnānāt (B.S.-4/4/2).⁴

Upaniṣadic philosophy maintains that liberation occurs when the soul becomes free. The self-knowledge of your true nature leads to freedom, as is taught in scripture. If liberation is simply something that the *jīva* achieves, then what makes it different from bondage? Three states of awakening, dreaming and sleep undergo the *jīva* in the state of bondage, and feel happiness and misery, think it is endless. Free from all misconceptions, it discovers its true nature: total bliss. This elimination of all erroneous assumptions is what people call freedom. Between these two states, the differences are massive. Liberated Soul is forever connected to Brahman. As noted in the Upanishads, the soul is in an inseparable state with the supreme Self, in freedom. The *Jīva*, or soul, is seen as part of Brahman, according to scriptures, and it exists as such in liberation. In Vedānta Paribhāṣā it is stated that – “Now the aim of Vedānta is being described. That which is known is described to belong to oneself is called an aim. It is of two kinds – primary and secondary of these pleasures and the absence of pain are primary aims, and the means to either of them is the secondary aim. Pleasure is also of two kinds – relative and absolute. Of these, relative

pleasure is a particular manifestation of a modicum of bliss caused by differences in the mental state generated by contact with objects”⁵

In Ātmabodha Śāṅkarācārya states that –

Bodhonya-Sadhanebhyo Hi

Sakshān-Mokṣa ikasādhanam I

Pākasya Vahnivat-Gyanam

Vinā Mokṣo Na Sidhyati II (Verse-2).⁵

Knowledge, not any other form of discipline, is the direct cause of liberation, and liberation cannot be achieved without Knowledge. While other ingredients like water, pots, and pans are required, the fire is what actually does the cooking. Here, knowledge is required, knowledge of oneself in particular..

In Vivekacūḍāmani Śāṅkarācārya mentions...

Jantūnām narañanma durlabhamataḥ puṁstvaṁ tato vipratā

tasmādvaidikadharmamārgaparatā vidvattvamasmātparam,

ātmānatmavivecanaṁ svanubhavo brahmātmana saṁsthitih

muktirno śatajanmakoṭisukṛtaḥ puṇyairvinā labhyate. (Verse -2).⁶

A human birth is difficult for everyone, but for men, it is even more difficult to achieve Brahminhood, and even more difficult still is to remain committed to the path of Vedic religion. Knowledge of the Scriptures comes before discrimination between the Self and not-Self, Realization, and continuing in an identity with Brahman. Unless you have the well-earned merits of one hundred billion births, you will never be able to attain this level of Mukti. Next Śloka it has been said that...

Durlabham trayamevaitaddevānugrahahetukam,

Manuṣyatvaṁ mumukṣutvaṁ mahāpuruṣasaṁśrayaḥ . (Verse -3)⁷

Three things are extremely rare and are only possible because of God's grace: human birth, the desire for Liberation, and the presence of a perfect sage to provide protective care. Manliness, a strong desire for Liberation, and the ability to completely surrender to Man of Wisdom are extremely rare, and whenever they do appear, it is because of the Lord's grace.. Liberation or freedom means in the Gītā unity with the supreme Self. The final state in the Gītā is called by

different names. It is called *Siddhi*, or perfections, *parāśiddhi*, or supreme perfection, *parama lakṣya*, or the supreme goal, " *Padam anāmayam* " or the blissful sheat. This state is also called *param śāntim*, or supreme peace and eternal abode (*sāsvatam sthānem*).

Śaṅkarācārya says in Pañcadaśī that - the jīva engages himself in action for getting enjoyments and does actions again for enjoyment. They soon after getting lost in the rebirth from one birth to another, as the insect fell into the river is swept from one whirlpool to another, and do not attain liberation. The jīva performs actions for the sake of enjoyment, then because of the karma one suffers again and again. Their fate is like an insect that has fallen into the river and is swept into one whirlpool after another. In this way, the jīva migrates from one life to another in an endless cycle of birth and death. There is no redemption. The food, vital air, mind, intellect and bliss sheaths are the five sheaths, covered by them, the *ātman* forgets its essential nature, and is subjected to a cycle of birth and death.⁸

Śaṅkarācārya stated also in Nirvāna Ṣaṭakam...

न मे द्वेष रागौ न मे लोभ मोहौ

मदो नैव मे नैव मात्सर्य भावः

न धर्मो न चार्थो न कामो ना मोक्षः

चिदानन्द रूपः शिवोऽहम् शिवोऽहम् ॥३॥⁹

I have no hatred or dislike, neither greed nor liking, no delusion, I have no pride or haughtiness, nor jealousy. I have no duty to perform (*dharmā*), no desire for any wealth or pleasure (*kāma*), I have no liberation (*mokṣa*) either. I am supreme bliss and pure consciousness, I am Shiva, I am all auspiciousness, I am Shiva.

3. Means to Liberation

Classical Advaita Vedānta emphasises the path of Jñāna Yoga, a study and training progression to achieve *mokṣa*. It's made up of four different character traits. These four qualities are required of an Advaita Vedānta practitioner.

1. *Nityānitya Vastu Viveka* (नित्यानित्य वस्तु विवेकम्) – Viveka is the capacity to differentiate between what is real and eternal (*nitya*) and what is transitory and unreal (*anitya*).

2. *Ihāmutrārtha Phala bhoga virāga* (इहाऽमुत्रार्थ फल भोगविरागम्) – Renunciation of all desires in this world and in other worlds for sensory pleasures. Prepared to surrender anything, whether material or mental, that blocks the search for truth and self-knowledge.

3. Śamādi ṣaṭka sampatti (शमादि षट्क सम्पत्ति) – the sixfold virtues or qualities.

1. **Shama** is the restraint of the mind from all objects except hearing, etc.
2. **Dama** is the practise of restraining one's external organs from contact with anything other than oneself.
3. **Uparati** is the cessation of these external organs, which have been restrained from pursuing other objects, or it could be the abandonment of the prescribed works as per scriptural injunctions..
4. **Titikshā** is the ability to withstand heat and cold, as well as all other kinds of opposing forces.
5. **Samādhāna** is constant concentration of the mind, so it is restrained on hearing, reading, and other objects that are helpful to the scriptural passages.
6. **shraddhā** is Faith in the teachings of Vedānta, as taught by the Guru.

4. Mumukṣutva (मुमुक्षुत्वम्) – *Mumukṣutva* is the yearning for freedom. A strong desire for freedom, liberation, and wisdom, which makes one determined to discover and understand things. The ultimate purpose of life is *mokṣa*.¹⁰

4. Notion of Śravaṇa, Manana and Nididhyāsana

With such mental, emotional, and willpower preparation, one should begin studying the Vedānta with a teacher who has realized Brahman. Listening to the teacher's instructions (*Śravaṇa*), understanding the instructions through reasoning until all doubts are removed and conviction is generated (*Manana*), and repeated meditation on the truths thus accepted (*Nididhyāsana*) are the three steps of this study. The forces of deep-seated beliefs from the past do not vanish just because the Vedānta truths are learned. Only repeated meditation on the truths and living a life in accordance with them will eventually root them out. When wrong beliefs are removed and permanent belief in Vedānta truths is achieved, the teacher tells the seeker, “Thou art That.” That which is the finest and subtlest of all things has Sat as its Self. That is the reality, the truth. This is Vedānta's final message. Your real identity is that Self, that essence, that pure Spirit.¹¹ He then begins to ponder this truth assiduously until, at long last, he has an immediate realization of the truth in the form “I am Brahman.” This illusory distinction between self and Brahman vanishes, and with it, bondage. As a result, liberation is achieved.¹²

According to Vedāntins, *Śravaṇa*, *Manana*, and *Nididhyāsana* are not merely acts of hearing, reflection, and profound meditation as they are commonly understood. *Śravaṇa* refers to a mental activity that aids in the comprehension of all Upaniṣadic texts as leading to their sole

significance, Brahman, and is accomplished by examining the texts through six tests (*upakrama-upasambhara*) and other means. *Manana* is also a mental activity that entails the use of favourable arguments to resolve apparent contradictions that such a claim may raise when compared to other forms of valid knowledge. *Nididhyāsana*, on the other hand, is a mental activity that entails withdrawing the mind from other things and focusing it on Brahman..¹³

5. The differences between Jivanmukti and Videhamukti

In Jivanmukti, the wise person's consciousness is firmly fixed in *Sat-cit-ānanda* Brahman. He transforms into Brahman. Even though the entire universe has vanished from his sight, he still knows it's there. Just as the man who was fooled by the mirage knows that it was an illusion, so too does the enlightened sage realize that this world is an illusion though it appears real to him. Liberation from the afflictions (or *Kleshas*) is called Jivanmukti.¹⁴ Unaffected by pleasure and pain, the liberated sage is not restricted by bondage. He is perfectly aware that the *Antahkaraṇa* is made up of both pleasure and pain, action and enjoyment. He has now become separated from his mind. The mind now stands before him as a spectator or witness.

Videhamukti meaning liberation after death. For the ascetic, the world is wiped from his sight in Videhamukti. There is no intimate trust with *Prapañca Pratiti*. As soon as *Prārabdha* is spent, and its enjoyment is exhausted, *Ajñāna* intervenes and takes on the modifications of the gross, subtle, and causal bodies. The *Samskāras* of Brahma Vidyā are filled with *Chetanā* (consciousness), which helps to eliminate the trace of ignorance, called the *Lesha Avidyā*, along with the effect, in a Jivanmukta. As the fire in the fuel devours the bundle of grass and burns itself, so too does the *Chetanā* in the *Samskāras* of Knowledge (knowledge-storing impressions) burn and eradicate the world and the *Samskāras* of Knowledge. It is only then that the pure, self-luminous *Sat-cit-ānanda* Brahman remains.

If one can be aware of my presence through direct intuitive experience, it is known as *Sākshātkāra* or Self-realization. One becomes a Jivanmukta the moment he discovers his *ātman*. A Jivanmukta is an individual who wanders happily in this world without any of the three kinds of fevers. He is liberated from all attachments and desires. He has absolutely no anger or aversion. He is an established role model. He is a model of virtue. He doesn't believe that he is the actor or the one who enjoys. He has a heart that is especially large.¹⁵

For someone who lacks a world-view and self-awareness, there is no Videhamukta. He is thrilled by his own radiant *Satcidānanda Svarupa*. His happiness is ineffable.

6. Conclusion

According to Advaita Vedānta, *Ātman* is identical to Brahman. This is expressed in the *Mahāvākya* “*Tat tvam asi*” , “Thou are that.” There is a common ground, viz. consciousness, to the individual and Brahman. Each soul, in Advaita view, is non-different from the infinite.

According to Śaṅkara, Ātman and Brahman seem different at the empirical level of reality, but this difference is only an illusion, and at the highest level of reality they are identical. Mokṣa is attained by realizing the identity of Ātman and Brahman, the complete understanding of one's real nature as Brahman in this life. This is frequently stated by Śaṅkarācārya, as:

I am other than name, form and action.

My nature is ever free!

I am Self, the supreme unconditioned Brahman.

I am pure Awareness, always non-dual.

— Adi Shankara, [Upadesasahasri 11.7.](#)

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