THE ROLE OF KNOWLEDGE IN UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF LIBERATION IN SANKARA’S PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

In Sankara’s Philosophy Mokṣa is understood as liberation which is attained by realizing our own self. In other words, which is attained as a process of purification of self which is gradually and increasingly turn into purer and purer intentional construction. According to Sankara, Mokṣa is not a state to be newly attained. It consists in the soul’s being absolutely all of a piece with itself. According to Sankara, it is knowledge and knowledge alone which is the means of Mokṣa and the highest knowledge is Mokṣa itself. Liberation in Sankara Vedanta means the realization of Para-Vidya, which may be understood in the realm of transcendental subjectivity this state is called Brahmabhava, which is described as truth, knowledge, and bliss (Sat, Chit, Ananda).

KEYWORDS: Mokṣa, Brahmabhava, Para-Vidya

INTRODUCTION

Liberation is the act of liberating or the state of being liberated. Indian philosophy, in general, understands liberation as Mokṣa, which etymologically is derived from the Sanskrit root muc+ktin to lose, set free, to let go, discharge, release, liberate, deliver, etc. These are identical in primary meaning with concepts like freedom, deliverance, emancipation, release, final deliverance or absolutization of the soul from metempsychosis. According to Indian schools of thought, Mokṣa is the highest value on realizing which nothing remains to be realized. It is the cessation of birth and death, all kinds of pain and at the same time, it is the realization of one's self.

Sankara’s Advaita philosophy is based on the following propositions: Brahman is the only reality; the world has apparent reality, and the soul is not different from Brahman. According to Sankara, Brahman is the basis (adhisthana) on which the world-form appears; it is the sustaining ground of all various modifications or vikaras. It is the highest self and self of all and reveals himself by dividing himself in multiple ways.

The whole world is the manifestation of the Supreme Being. Brahman modifying itself into the atman or internal self of all things is the world. Sankara’s Advaita system proceeds from a very simple assumption and one which has some scriptural backing. This is the thesis that there is a complete identity between the self and the power sustaining the cosmos. It follows that the apparent multiplicity of selves is an illusion and by extension the whole variegation of empirical existence is illusory. There is then only one reality and all else in so far as it gives an impression of being a substantial and

1Vaishali Sunil Karnik, Concept of Mokṣa (Delhi: Bharatiya Kala Prakashan, 2012),3.
2Ibid., pp.1
independent reality is productive of a kind of the bewitchment of the mind. The Brahman alone exists, and empirical existence is an insubstantial appearance. Once this has been realized there is a release that we call liberation. This paper will begin with the nature of knowledge, it will follow by knowledge in Sankara’s philosophy, that will be followed by liberation in Sankara’s philosophy and the next two sections will be on means of realization and the path of liberation.

**THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE**

Epistemology or Knowledge theory is concerned with what and how we know. Thus it is concerned with the limits of finite relative conventional conceptual knowledge which leads necessarily to ontology or metaphysics and the realization of truth.\(^3\) In India, philosophy was conceived to be a single process or activity; it was parcelled out into departments or split into branches. Thus, the Nyāyāsūtras mention pramāṇas or the instruments of knowledge along with the prameyas or the objects of knowledge as the topics of philosophical discourse. In the Vedānta, in particular, it is impossible to separate epistemology from ontology for the reason that the first principle of that system is itself conceived to be the nature of knowledge. In ancient Indian philosophy, epistemology tended to assume the following three forms: (i) the discussion or delineation of the pramāṇas (ii) ontological analysis of knowledge or cognition; and (iii) the discussion or determination of the criteria of truth or right knowledge. According to Vedānta Paribhāṣa (a classical text of Advaita Vedānta) that knowledge is valid which has for its object something that is non-sublated. Non-Sublatability is considered as the ultimate criterion for valid knowledge.\(^4\) Most of the Indian schools of thought accepted the transcendental value of cognition without denying the relative validity of our ordinary experience and knowledge. All of them admit that from this imperfect state of knowledge, mixed with illusion and ignorance, we have to rise to the standard of absolute consciousness of Brahman which is characterized as the Saccittananda.\(^5\) To establish the absolute validity of knowledge, the Indian schools have followed different ways, which can be reduced to two conceptions: The Absolutist view of knowledge and The Synthetic view of knowledge. The Absolute view of knowledge has its root in the Upanishads. According to the Upanishads, the absolute reality is characterized as Satyam-Jnanam-Anantam, i.e., Infinite Reality, Infinite Intelligence, and Infinite Bliss. Here, Brahman is the Absolute Reality, where intelligence and reality are but different aspects of the same thing. It is the plenitude of Supreme reality( satyasyasatyayam), and Self-luminous ( svayam-jyothin) through the light of which all else shines. Hence, knowledge and intelligence are not something relative in Brahman, but it shines by itself.\(^6\) The Mimāṃsākas and Sankara Advaita were the schools who advocated this theory. Again, we have the Synthetic view of knowledge, as we already talk about the Absolute view of knowledge as having one absolute thing. In other words, it is self-luminosity, here, in the Synthetic view of knowledge, it deals with knowledge between subject and object, i.e., paraprakasatva. Nyāya school and Samkhya school defend dualism in knowledge. The theory of the Synthetic character of knowledge meets its typical representative in Ramanuja. For him, Atman is made up of consciousness, which is both the svarupa (essence) and guna (attribute) of it. In Indian philosophy, knowledge is generally assumed as a kind of relation, and it is an irreducible relation. When we examine the idea of epistemology in Indian and Western traditions, there is a contrast point between the two traditions. According to the Indian thought, this world must overcome and must seek the

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\(^3\) David Paul Boaz. Knowledge and Liberation Advaita Vedanta Epistemology accessed from davidpaulboaz.org/-documents/stromata/knowledge_and_liberation.

\(^4\) Internet Encyclopedia of philosophy accessed on 3 September 2018.


\(^6\) Ibid., pp. 83.
inner life of subjectivity. In other words, their method is reaching this goal completely divergent. It suggests that Indian epistemological inquiry is motivated by the practical goal of salvation and develops its epistemological theories only to substantiate such aim.

**KNOWLEDGE IN SANKARA'S PHILOSOPHY**

Sankara holds that Brahman, although it is of the nature of an already existent reality, cannot be the object of perception and other means of knowledge. According to Sankara, sense-organs which is the basis of all perception, i.e., empirical things cannot grasp the reality because senses by their very nature reveal the external things and not Brahman or ultimate reality. For Sankara, Anubhava is the pramāṇa which alone enable us to have direct access to Brahman or the Absolute reality. According to Sankara, Anubhava consists of a complete and adequate apprehension of reality. The man who knows reality by such intuition (Anubhava) becomes a reality. (Brahmavidā Brahmaiva Bhavati) Brahman or reality is nothing but this integral experiences. According to Sankara, through knowledge science bedestroyed. The knowledge which the Upanishads recommend is the knowledge of the Brahman, the Absolute Reality. There is no way to Salvation except through knowledge. Sankara’s system of knowledge is the pure awareness identical with the metaphysical first principle, i.e., Brahman. The first principle is declared by Sankara to be indeterminate or unqualified though not indefinable. The Brahman resists being determined by qualifying adjectives for adjectives is to enable us to distinguish a term from members of the same class and the Brahman, being unique cannot be distinguished. Philosophy for him is the Parā-Vidyā whose special concern is the study of the indestructible. The moral and psychological distinction drawn by certain Upanishads between the pursuits of the higher and lower goods is raised by Sankara to the status of a metaphysical tenet. In the introduction to the Upanishads, S. Radhakrishnan states that the Upanishads distinguish between the Apara and Parā-Vidyā, while former gives us knowledge of the Vedas and the sciences, the latter helps us gain the knowledge of the imperishable. In other words, the Upanishads claimed Sankara described Brahman from two points of view: the higher knowledge (Parā-Vidyā) and the lower knowledge (Apara-Vidyā). Apara-Vidyā consists in the knowledge of the Vedas and sciences while Para-Vidyā deals with the knowledge and realization of the imperishable Brahman.

**LIBERATION IN SANKARA’S PHILOSOPHY**

That entity in the absolute sense real, highest of all, eternal, all-penetrating like the ether exempt from all change, all-sufficing, undivided whose nature is to be its lighting which neither good nor evil has any place nor future this incorporeal entity is called liberation. When we examine the conception of the definition of liberation, we found the similarity with the definition of Brahman, which means the conception of liberation contains the same characteristics as serve as rule to define Brahman and indeed Brahman and the state of liberation are identical terms, liberation is nothing else than the becoming one with Brahman.

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7Ibid., pp.87.
8Ibid., pp.87.
9Ibid., pp.87.
11Ibid., pp.1.1.2
According to Sankara, the Brahman alone exists; or in different terms, the self alone exists, and empirical existence is an insubstantial appearance once this has been realized existentially there is a release that we called liberation. According to Sankara, it is knowledge and knowledge alone which is the means of Mokṣa and the highest knowledge is Mokṣa itself. For Sankara, liberation is attained as a process of purification of self which is gradually and increasingly turn into purer and purer intentional constructions. In other words, we can say liberation in Sankara Vedanta means the realization of Para-Vidyā which may be understood in the realm of transcendental subjectivity this state is called Brahmabhava and is described as truth, knowledge, and bliss. (Sat, Chit Ananda)

According to Sankara, perfection, i.e., Mokṣa is not a state to be newly attained. It consists in the soul’s being absolutely all of piece with itself.16 In the book A Comparative Study of the Concept of Liberation in Indian Philosophy by A.K Lad, Mokṣa is the realization of non-difference from Brahman. The liberation of the Atman consists in realizing the fact that it is one and non-different from Brahman. Brahman is the ultimate reality beyond space, time and causation. Sankara’s Mokṣa is a matter of direct realization of something existent from eternity, through it is hidden from our view when the limitations are removed the soul is liberated.17 In the book Brahma- Sutra-Bhasya of Sankaracharya, discusses the concept of liberation; he mentions that there is no rule of this kind about the result called liberation because such a state has been determined (to be same) about liberation. One must not entertain any misconception of any such rule being applicable with individual variation in the matter of the resulting liberation. The Upanishads have ascertained that state of being the same; in all the Upanishads the state of liberation being nothing but Brahman itself. Mokṣa is not the result of karma, which is purusatantra. It is a result of enlightenment which is vastutantra and which dawns on a person, and he realizes his true self as it is in its lone splendor and he is no more confuses it with what is not his self as he did before.

MEANS OF REALIZATION

It is generally acknowledged that the two most important requirements to know one's self are discrimination and dispassion. To realize the self or Atman, the aspirant needs to control his mind and purify his intellect. One can realize one’s self in the body. One needs to identify oneself with the Real and give up attachment with the unreal. Thereby one will be established in Brahma and cross over this ocean of worldly existence with its ceaseless waves of birth and death. To remove his bondage, the wise man should discriminate between the self and the non-self and also he indeed is free who discriminates between all sense objects and indwelling, unattached and inactive self and merging everything in it, remains in a state of identity with that.18

THE PATH TO LIBERATION

Sankara accepts Mokṣa (liberation) the eternal state of Brahman obtained by the knowledge of Brahman that destroys avidyā(an ignorance). According to him, liberation means the state of Brahman only. He elucidates the concept of liberation in explicit terms in his commentary on the Sūratattusamanvayā Śāṅkarabhāṣya. He further adds that avidyā is removed by the knowledge of Brahman. It is nothing but the destruction of avidyā by the knowledge of the oneness of Brahman. According to Sankara, jñāna (knowledge) alone is means of liberation and jñāna is never subordinate

to karma which is prescribed in the Vedas. The release is nothing but being Brahman. Therefore, Release is not something to be purified and is nobody can show any other way in which release could be connected with action; it is impossible that it should stand in any, even the slightest, relation to any action, expecting knowledge.\textsuperscript{19} In the book, The System of the Vedānta, Paul Deussen, describes liberation consists only in knowledge, but knowledge of special kind, in that there is no question of an object which investigation could discover and contemplate but only of that which never be an object, because in every cognition it is the subject of cognition; everything can be seen, but not the seer of seeing.

**CONCLUSIONS**

I have started with ‘The Nature of Knowledge’ with the definition of knowledge theory as which is concerned with what and how we know, thus concerned with the limits of finite relative conventional conceptual knowledge which leads necessarily to ontology or metaphysics and the realization of absolute truth. In the ancient Indian Philosophy, epistemology tended to assume the following three forms: the discussion or delineation of the pramāṇas, secondly, ontological analysis of knowledge or cognition and thirdly, the discussion or determination of the criteria of truth or right knowledge. After this, I have discussed different schools of Indian thought in accepting valid means of knowledge. We further discussed two conceptions of view of knowledge, i.e., The Absolute view of knowledge and the Synthetic view of knowledge. The Absolute view of knowledge has its root in the Upanishads. According to the Upanishads, Absolute reality is characterized by Satyam-Jnanam-Anantam.

On the other hand, Synthetic view of knowledge deals between subject and object. After this I have discussed, the idea of epistemology in Indian and Western traditions, in the Indian tradition, this world must be overcome and one must seek towards the inner life of subjectivity, i.e., Indian epistemology inquiry is motivated by the practical goal of salvation, which is not in western tradition only pursuing the goal of pure theory for no external purposes. In the next section, we have examined Sankara’s understanding of valid means of knowledge. For him, Anubhava (direct intuition) is the only pramāṇa which alone can enable us to direct access to Brahman. According to him, the man who knows reality by such intuition becomes a reality. According to Sankara, by knowledge alone nescience (ignorance) can be destroyed with all its effect there is no way to attain liberation except through knowledge. Here Sankara’s system of knowledge in the pure awareness is identified with the metaphysical first principle, i.e., Brahman. After this, we discussed ‘The means of realization’ Discrimination and dispassion are the two most important requirements to know one’s self. To realize the self or Atman, the aspirant needs to control his mind and purify his intellect. In the section ‘The Path to Liberation’ we discussed Sankara accepts Mokṣa (liberation ), the eternal state of Brahman obtained by knowledge of Brahman that destroys avidyā( an ignorance) according to him, liberation means the state of Brahman Jñāna( knowledge) alone is the means of liberation.

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