

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 absolution of the soul from metempsychosis.¹ 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.²

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 (*adhithana*) 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.³In India, philosophy was conceived to be a single process or activity; it was parceled 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 Paribhāsa* (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.⁴Most 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*.⁵To 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 (*satyaayasatyam*), 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.⁶The Mīmāṃsākas 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 *guṇa* (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

³ David Paul Boaz. Knowledge and Liberation Advaita Vedanta Epistemology accessed from davidpaul boaz.org/-documents/stromata/knowledge_and_liberation.

⁴ Internet Encyclopedia of philosophy accessed on 3 September 2018.

⁵ Sebastian Velassery and Rena Patra, *Caste Identities and the Ideology of Exclusion*, Delhi: Overseas Press India Private Limited, 2012, pp.82.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 83.

inner life of subjectivity. In other words, their method is reaching this goal completely divergent.⁷It suggests that Indian epistemological inquiry is motivated by the practical goal of salvation and develops its epistemological theories only to substantiate such aim.⁸Western philosophy, on the other hand, pursues the goal of pure theory as a whole.⁹

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.¹⁰According 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.¹¹According to Sankara, *Anubhava* consists of a complete and adequate apprehension of reality. The man who knows reality by such intuition (*Anubhava*) becomes a reality. (*BrahmavidaBrahmaivaBhavati*) *Brahman* or reality is nothing but this integralexperiences. According to Sankara, through knowledge science be destroyed. The knowledge which the *Upanishads* recommend is the knowledge of the *Brahman*, the Absolute Reality. There is no way to Salvation except through knowledge.¹²Sankara'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.¹³In other words, the *Upanishads* claimed Sankara described *Brahman* from two points of view: the higher knowledge (*Parā-Vidyā*) and the lower knowledge (*Apara-Vidyā*).¹⁴*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.¹⁵When 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*.

⁷Ibid.,pp.87.

⁸Ibid.,pp.87.

⁹Ibid.,pp.87.

¹⁰Śamākarabhāṣyā on *Brahmasūtra* Trans by Swami Madhavananda, Kolkatta: Advaita Ashram, 1965.

¹¹Ibid.,pp.1.1.2

¹² S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upaniṣads* Śvet.Up.iii.8. London: George Allen and Unwin LTD, 1953.

¹³ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* volume ii, London: George Allen and Unwin LTD, 1962,pp.447.

¹⁴ Troy Wilson Organ, *The Self in Indian Philosophy*, Mouton and Co. London, 1964, pp. 95.

¹⁵ Paul Deussen, *The System of Vedanta* (Delhi: D.K. Publishers Distributors Private limited, 1995) pp. 401.

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.¹⁶In 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.¹⁷In 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 *purusantra*. 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 *Sūtratattvasamānvayāt* Sankara says *Brahma-bhāvascamokṣaḥ* (BSŚāṅkarbhāṣya pp.18). A state free from the body is called *Mokṣa* (liberation). 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

¹⁶Balbir Singh, *Atman and Moksha* (Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1981) pp. 176.

¹⁷S Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy Volume II* (London: George Allen and Unwin 1971) pp. 636.

¹⁸Sankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani* (trans. Swami Madhavananda), Kolkata: Advaita Ashram, 2009, pp. 153.

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.¹⁹In 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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