

Ramanuja's Liberation – A Study

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Abstract: *When the people of ancient time realized that the world is full of misery, pain, sufferings, sorrow etc, only these pains are permanent and happiness is temporary then the philosophers, scientists started to think that is there any means which can remove our pain and sufferings etc...? ..is there any supreme goal in human life? To answer these questions many philosophies were originated. They found that liberation is the supreme goal of our life. Every Indian philosophy accepts liberation as the supreme goal of life except Carvaka philosophy. Ramanuja's philosophy also accepts liberation as the summum bonum of life. But his view is little bit different than others. So in my paper I will focus on the view of Ramanuja regarding liberation.*

Aims and objectives:

- ✓ **What is liberation according to Ramanuja?**
- ✓ **How it differs from Sankaracharya belonging to the same Vedanta philosophy?**

I. INTRODUCTION

The philosophy of Vedānta is enshrined in the Upaniṣads, the Gīta and the Brahmasūtra, which together constitutes its foundation and supreme authority. 'Vedānta' literally means the end of the vedas. Primarily the word stood for the Upaniṣads though afterwards its denotation widened to include all thoughts developed out of the Upaniṣads.

The Upaniṣads were many in number and developed in the different vedic schools at different times and places. The problems discussed and solutions offered presented differences in spite of a unity of general outlook. The need was felt, therefore in course of time for systematising the different teachings so as to bring out the harmony underlying them. Bādarāyaṇa composed 'Brahmasūtra'. But his sūtras being brief, were liable to different interpretations. Various commentaries thus came to be written to elaborate the doctrines of the vedānta in their own light. Each tried to justify its position as the only one consistent with the revealed texts and the Sūtras. The author of each of these chief commentaries became the founder of a particular school of Vedānta. Thus we have the schools of *Samkhya*, *Rāmānuja*, *Madhva*, *Vallava*, *Nimbārka* and many others.

The most common question on which the schools of the vedānta are divided is what is the nature of the relation between the self and God (Brahman). In this context *Rāmānuja* hold that these two are related like part and whole, this view may be called qualified monism (*Viśiṣṭādvaita*). *Rāmānuja*'s philosophy is called as *Viśiṣṭādvaita* philosophy. His commentary on Brahmasūtra is known as *Śrībhāṣya*.

The word '*Viśiṣṭādvaita*' signifies that the ultimate reality is an integral whole consisting of the cit or the sentient beings and acit or insentient matter, both of which constitute the body of *Īśvara*.

Like other philosophies *Rāmānuja* also accepts liberation as the summum bonum of our life. But his view point is different. To understand *Rāmānuja*'s concept on liberation we must know his concept on other features like God (Brahman), Self (*Jīva* or *Cit*), relation between God and Self, Matter (*Acit*).

II. CONCEPT OF GOD

In Rāmānuja's concept of God we may notice three points of importance. First, God is identified with the absolute. He is Brahman and Brahman must be a Saviśeṣa or a qualified unity. When the Upaniṣads deny the qualities of Brahman, they really mean that God is free from all bad qualities or imperfections. God stands for the whole universe and matter and souls form His body, He being their soul. As the absolute, the ultimate unity -in and trinity the concrete whole, God may be viewed through two stages – as cause and as effect. During the state of dissolution God remains as the cause with subtle matter and unembodied souls forming His body. The whole Universe lies latent in Him. During the state of creation the subtle matter becomes gross and the unembodied souls become embodied according to their karmas. In this effect state the Universe becomes manifested. The former state is called the causal state of Brahman while the later state is the effect state of Brahman.

Secondly God is considered as the immanent inner controller, the qualified substance who is in Himself changeless and is the unmoved mover of this world process. In His essence He does not suffer change which is said to fall to the lot of His attributes or modes only. Rāmānuja makes no distinction between an attribute and a mode. Matter and Souls may be called either attributes or modes. They are absolutely dependent on God and are inseparable from Him. God is the unchanging controller of all changes and the limitations of matter as well as the miseries and the imperfections of the finite souls do not affect the essence of God.

Thirdly, God is also transcendent. He is the perfect personality. He has a divine body. Embodiment is not the cause of bondage. It is karma which is the cause of bondage. Hence, God, though embodied is not bound, for He is the Lord of karma. God as the perfect personality is devoid of all demerits and possesses all merits. He has infinite knowledge and bliss. He has a divine body and is the creator, preserver and destroyer of this Universe.

III. CONCEPT OF SELF OR JĪVA OR CIT

Rāmānuja gives a distinctive doctrine of Jīva. Based on the teachings of the Upaniṣads, the Vedānta – Sūtras and the Bhagavad Gita he establishes that the Jīva or the individual Self is an eternal spiritual entity and is distinct from the supreme self or Brahman. It is beyond creation and destruction. In the state of creation, it is embodied according to its karmas, while in the state of dissolution and in the state of liberation, it remains in itself.

Though it is eternal, real, unique, uncreated and imperishable, yet it is finite and individual, being only a part or a mode of God.

It is regarded as atomic in size. Though it is really subjected to earthly existence and to the various imperfections, defects and miseries which the worldly life implies, yet these do not affect its essence. The soul is different from its body, sense-organs, mind, vital breaths and even cognition. The soul

is conceived as a real knower, a real agent and a real enjoyer. The soul is a self-luminous substance as well as self-conscious subject. There innumerable individual souls.

Rāmānuja describes three classes of souls. To the first belong the ever free (Nityamukta) souls which were never bound. They are ever free from karma and prakṛti and live in Vaikuntha in constant service of Lord.

To the second belong the released or liberated (Mukta) souls who were once bound but who obtained liberation through their action, knowledge and devotion.

To the third belong the bound (baddha) souls who were wondering in samsāra on account of ignorance and bad karmas. These are further divided into four classes – superhuman, human, animal and immobile.

IV. RELATION BETWEEN SELF AND GOD

Rāmānuja explains the relation of Jīva(Self) to Brahman (God) by adopting the metaphysical category of substance and attribute and the concept Aprthaksiddhi. According to Rāmānuja substance and attribute are distinct but inseparable. On the basis of this metaphysical concept, Rāmānuja asserts that Jīva is different as well as non different from Brahman. Brahman and Jīva as amśī and amśa or substance and attribute are distinct, in the same way as the light radiating is different from a luminous thing, spark from fire. It is on the basis of this that the Upaniṣadic texts speak of difference between the two. But at the same time, substance and attribute being inseparable, they constitute one entity as an integral and complex whole. Brahman as integrally related to Jīvas is aViśiṣṭa entity and as such it is one. It is in this sense that the texts speak of non-difference between Jīva and Brahman.

Regarding the relation between Jīva(Self) and Brahman(God), Rāmānuja has used many seemingly contradictory expressions. He vehemently criticizes the views of identity (Abheda) of difference (Bheda) and of identity and difference (Bhedābheda) also. Some people believe that Rāmānuja in a sense advocates all these relations.

But we can inter-relate these three kinds of contradictory opinions taking the relations of Jīva and Brahman in amsa and amsi. There is difference between Jīva and Brahman. Brahman is complete, endless, but Jiva is incomplete and anu. Again Jīva and Brahman are indifferent, because Brahman is the soul of Jīva. Rāmānuja says that there is bheda and abheda relation between Jiva and Brahman. So it is said that Rāmānuja is the supporter of Bheda, Abheda, Bhedābheda these three types of relation.

So it may not be wrong in saying that there are these three types of relations between God and Self.

V. CONCEPT OF MATTER OR ACIT

According to Rāmānuja Acit or unconscious substance is of three kinds – Prakṛti or Miśhrasattva, Nitya -vibhūti or

Śuddhasattva and Kāla or Sattvaśhunya. Of these prakṛtiis ordinary matter which makes saṃsāra. It has three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas. It forms the body of God and is more completely dependent on God than souls who have freedom of will. At the time of creation, the process of world evolution starts from prakṛti. There are some differences between Sāṃkhya conception of prakṛti and Rāmānuja's conception of it. Sattva, rajas and tamas are the constitutive elements of prakṛiti in Sāṃkhya, but here they are merely qualities of prakṛiti. In Sāṃkhya, these three elements can never remain separate, but here Nityavibhūti is made up of pure sattva. In Sāṃkhya, is infinite, but here prakṛiti is limited. In Sāṃkhya prakṛiti is independent, but here prakṛiti is absolutely dependent on God and is inseparable from Him. It is also called Līāvibhūti because creation is His sport.

Nityavibhuti or Śuddhasattva is made up of pure sattva and is called ajada or immaterial like Dharmabhūtajñāna. The ideal world and the bodies of God and eternal and liberated souls are made of this stuff.

Kala or time is another unconscious substance and is given a separate status. It does not possess consciousness and form. It exists in this world as well as in the supreme abode.

These three kinds of matter as well as three kinds of Jīvas constitute the body of God Viṣṇu.

According to Rāmānuja the matter is not an appearance like Śaṃkara, it is real and the elements of this are also real. Rāmānuja rejects the Maya of Śaṃkara So he gave seven anūpapattis against Māyāvada.

VI. CONCEPT OF LIBERATION

Human being has four types of Puruṣārtha simply called as Puruṣārthasatustaya viz. Dharma, artha, kāma and Mokṣha. Mokṣha is the ultimate aim of our life. Every school of Indian philosophy except Cārvāka accept liberation. They showed different paths to attain liberation but their aim is same. Liberation is about to get relief from the bondage of the worldly objects. According to Rāmānuja Bondage is the embodied state of the soul where it wrongly identifies itself with the body and its different states and organs. Individual souls remain in their essential nature forming the divine body along with unconscious matter at the time of dissolution. But at the time of creation these souls become associated with particular bodies in accordance with merit or demerit acquired through action performed during previous embodied existences. Rāmānuja avoids the question as to why pure disembodied souls become embodied in the very first occasion and simply states that the relation between soul and its past deeds is beginningless. Bondage is the state here the soul out of ignorance of its essential pure nature thinks that it is identical with body it is in. The embodied soul reaps the fruits of its past actions and may have to pass through several births to get its entire quota of fruits of actions exhausted.

The souls are bound on account of their ignorance and karma. Due to its karmas, the soul becomes associated with particular body, senses, mind and life. For obtaining release from Saṃsāra the soul has to remove its karmic obstacles. And this can be done by a harmonious combination of action and knowledge. The duties enjoined by Veda, if rightly performed, help the soul in removing its karmic obstacles. But Rāmānuja insists that the karmas should be performed in an absolutely disinterested manner simply to please God. As ignorance is the cause of bondage, naturally knowledge will be the means to Liberation. The immediate intuitive knowledge of God, the highest reality is the cause of liberation according to Rāmānuja. He advocates the necessity of a harmonious combination of both action (karma) and knowledge (jnana). The karmakānda and the Jñānakānda of the Vedas are to be treated as two interrelated aspects of one method. The vedic actions, if properly performed, help in removing the effects of past actions which stand as obstacles in the path of salvation. The soul with then realise that mere performance of actions enjoined in the Devas is not enough for attaining Liberation. It has to acquire the right knowledge about the nature of god along with the knowledge that matter and souls form the body of God. Such knowledge one can attain by studying the Jñānakānda of Vedānta. Rāmānuja admits that knowledge is the immediate cause of liberation but also reminds that such knowledge is not ordinary knowledge of Vedanta for then anyone who studies Vedānta will attain liberation.

Real knowledge which leads to liberation is identical with highest devotion. Such devotion is attained through self-surrender and constant remembrance of God as the only object of devotion. Performance of actions enjoined in the Vedas and ordinary knowledge lead to realization of ordinary devotion, called prapatti which means flinging oneself the absolute mercy of God. Prapatti is a means to realise devotion of the absolute type which Rāmānuja identifies with pure knowledge God. Such immediate and intuitive knowledge is the direct cause of liberation, though it can not be acquired through devotion alone.

Rāmānujācārya disagrees to the view that on attainment of liberation the individual self becomes merged in God. Souls in their essential nature are identical to the Absolute Substance of which they are simply modes. But they are distinct individuals and their individuality persists even in the liberated state. Liberation means direct intuitive realisation of the self about its own essential and pure nature. Such realisation is possible only after all the fruits of its past deeds are exhausted. According to Ramanuja there is no provision of jīvanmukti for the embodied soul. It has to be free all types of association to the body so that it can attain liberation.

Divine grace has been conceived as an essential factor for liberation. The liberated soul become similar to God though not identical to him. The released souls dwell in direct communion with God and enjoy infinite consciousness and infinite bliss.

VII. COMPARISON BETWEEN ŚAMKARĀCĀRYA AND RĀMĀNUJĀCĀRYA

Rāmānujācārya admits the world as real while Śamkara says – ब्रह्म सत्यं जगत् मिथ्या। That means Brahman is the ultimate reality. The world is false. To show this falsity of the world he takes help of Maya, which is considered as the magical power of Brahman. But Rāmānuja has raised seven fold objections against the Māyā theory of Śamkara's Vedānta. These seven charges are – Āśrayānupapattiḥ, Tirodhānānupapattiḥ, Svarupānupapattiḥ, Pramāṇānupapattiḥ, Nivartakānupapattiḥ and Nivṛtyānupapattiḥ.

According to Śamkara the Self is the reflection of Brahman, It has no existence. In Śamkara's philosophy Brahman and Jīva are called indifferent. But accordingly to Rāmānuja there are differences between Brahman and Jīva.

In Śamkara's philosophy ultimate reality is Nirguṇa, but in Rāmānuja's philosophy it is Saguṇa.

In Śamkara's philosophy we have found God as false, it has no existence. Śamkara does not admit any distinction in Brahman while Rāmānuja admits swagatabheda in Brahman.

According to Śamkara liberated soul become identical with Brahman but according to Rāmānuja the liberated soul does not become identical with Brahman but only similar to Brahman.

I have noticed these differences between Śamkarācārya and Rāmānujācārya.

VIII. CONCLUSION

From the above discussion I have found that there is only one reality and that is Brahman which is Saguṇa. And as a part of this reality Jīva and Jagat are also real. I have found one more thing that we are here because of our karma and ignorance. When we will be able in removing the karmic obstacles and ignorance then we will attain liberation.

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