

The Concept of Self: Ramanuja

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Abstract: *The aim of this paper is to explore the concept of self in visistadvaita Vedanta advocate by Ramanuja. In this paper I shall try to elaborate the soul is a knowing subject and unique center of experience. Ramanuja asserts the reality of individual souls and their distinctness from Brahman. It also highlights nature of individual self according to Ramanuja. The paper may try to include the various concepts regarding self given by different schools of Indian philosophy. This paper is to sketch out the relation between self and God. According to Ramanuja, God is the soul of souls. In general term the paper may be approach and discussed how individual self attain salvation.*

Keywords: Self, Salvation, Liberation, Brahman, Ataman

Aims and Objectives of the Paper

- 1) The paper tries to highlight the concept of self in special reference to Ramanuja.
- 2) The paper tries to focus on the real nature of individual self and reality of individual selves and their distinctness from Brahman.
- 3) Paper attempt to focus on the various concepts regarding self given by different schools of Indian philosophy.
- 4) The paper also an attempt is to sketch out relation between individual self and God.
- 5) Moreover the paper torch light on a detail discussion how individual self attain salvation

1. Introduction

Visistadvaita is one of the most popular school of Vedanta school of Indian philosophy. Vedanta literally means the end of Vedas. Primarily the word „Vedanta“ stood for Upanishads; afterward, its denotation widened to include all thoughts developed out of the Upanishads. *visistadvaita* is a non-dualistic school of Vedanta philosophy. It is non-dualism of qualified whole, in which Brahman alone exist, but characterized by multiplicity. It can be described as qualified monism or attributive monism. It is a school of Vedanta philosophy which believes in all diversity including to an underlying unity. Ramanuja is the chief exponent of qualified monism. Ramanuja attempts to synthesize Vaisnavism with the Vedanta. *Visistadvaita* accepts as ultimate the three entities of matter (acit), individual self (cit) and Isvra. Ramanuja admits the individual self as a part of Brahman and also admits its ontological reality. Ramanuja has given us for the first time systematic forms of monotheism. According to him, Brahman is the highest reality, but this Brahman is full of love.

Ramanuja recognizes soul as individuals possesses really the cit and acit, what perceive and what does not perceive, soul and matter, form as it were the body of Brahman, are in fact modes of Brahman. Matter and individual self are absolutely dependent on Isvra. The universal selves are the conscious selves as well as unconscious matter. Isvra controls matter and selves for His own purpose. Ramanuja maintains that the relation between the body and the self is inseparable. The inseparable unity of matter and selves and Isvara constitute the reality.

2. Ramanuja's Concept of Self

A soul is a part of Brahman qualified by it. for it is the body of Brahman, an attribute is a part of a qualified substance. So a soul which is an attribute of Brahman is a part of it. A material thing also, like a soul, is a part of Brahman it is the body of Brahman. Just as light both different and non-different form a luminous body where of it is part, so matter and soul are both different and non-different from Brahman.

The common characteristics of individual self and Isvra are self-consciousness; sentiency; selfhood and monadic. The Jiva is a different from the body as in the perception. And it also different from the vital breath and consciousness. The self is an eternal point of spiritual light. It is beyond creation and destruction is its severance from it. In the state of creation, it is embodied according to its karmas and in the dissolution and liberation it remains it itself. The self is embodied in the state of creation. In the state of dissolution, it is tinged with past karmas and become embodied to reap the fruits of its karmas but in liberation the soul enjoy absolute ananda untouched by karmas. According to Ramanuja, the soul is conceived as a real knower. It is a real agent and real enjoyer. Consciousness is the nature and attributes of the self. Individual self is only the a part or a mode of God. It is atomic in size. As it is atomic in size, hence it is imperceptible and changeless. The Sruti speakers of the soul as atomic and knowable by the mind (citas) and being the hundredth part of the tip of a hair.

The self is the nature of knowledge. Knowledge is an essential and inseparable attribute of it. It is the substance of its Dharmabhutajnana. The objects are known by it through its knowledge. Knowledge exists for the self. Knowledge is its very essence. Knowledge belongs to the self even in deep sleep and liberation. When the self in is bondage it means that its knowledge is obstructed by its karmas. In liberation, the self becomes all comprehensive as all the karmas and destroyed. The essential nature of the individual self is devoid of the manifold distinction parting to the various modifications of material natural constitutive of the bodies of the various kinds like heavenly and human. It has only knowledge and bliss as its attributes. When the bodily differentiations born of karma are destroyed, the essential individuals indescribable but self-recognized, can only represented as of the nature of consciousness. This essential nature is common to all individual selves.

The Srivaishnam doctrines concerning the nature of the Jiva or self are as follows:

- 1) The self is neither physical body nor cognitive mind but an atomic spiritual entity.
- 2) The self is that which is referred to an "I" by the individual; it is the subject of knowledge which perceives the body and mind as objects it is not manifest to, and cannot grasped by external sense and is devoid of all parts.
- 3) The essential five attributes of the self in its original state are consciousness (cit), purity (amalan) and eternity (anatman).
- 4) The self is the finite and individual, being only a part or a mode of God.

Through it is real, it is not independent. It is utterly dependent on God. It is the body of God who is its soul. It is supported by God. Utilized by God and controlled by God. The self is the supported and God is its support. it is the means and God is its end. It is a part and God is the whole.

The various views regarding self given by different schools of Indian philosophy:

Different Indian schools discuss the concept of self in different ways. These are as follows:

- 1) **Cravaka:** According to carvaka, the body itself constitutes the self. The carvaka admits that the existence of consciousness proved by perception. But they deny that consciousness is the quality of any unperceived entity. As consciousness is perceived to exit in the perceptible living body composed of the material elements, it must be a quality of this body itself. What people mean by a soul is nothing more than this conscious living body.(caitanya-visista deha eva atma).
- 2) **Jaina:** A jiva or a soul is a conscious substance. According to the Jaina, the self consists of the soul or jiva which occupies the body. Consciousness is the essence of the self. the soul is formless but occupy a body.
- 3) **Buddha:** Buddha denies the existence of such a soul or self. According to Buddhism, continuity is possible without identity, hence there is no need to postulate a self is reborn, for the next birth can be viewed as being. The conception of a soul is thus replace here y that of an unbroken stream of consciousness as in the philosophy of William James. While the Carvaka School does not believe in an atman and denies anything like liberation. Again Jaina school believes in both but Buddhism denies the existence of a self while upholding liberation from rebirth in the usual sense.
- 4) **Nyaya and Vaishika:** The concepts of the self in the Nyaya the Vaishika schools have much in common and presented together. Both adopt the realistic view of the self. According to them, the self is a unique substance, to a its attributes desire, aversion and volition, pleasure, pain and cognition are all qualities of the self. According to them, the soul is eternal but consciousness is nit its inherent property. Consciousness arise when the self is conjoined with manas or the mind. The self is not mere consciousness or knowledge, but a knower an ego or the „I“ (ahankarasha), and also an enjoyer.(bhokta)
- 5) **Sankhya:** According to Sankhya self is the second type of ultimate reality. The existence of the self must be admitted by all. Everybody feels and asserts that he or

she exists, and has this or that thing belonging to him or her. In Sankhya the self is called purusa and represents pure consciousness, in opposition to prakriti. According to Sankhya, the self is different from the body and the sense, the manas and the buddhi. It is not anything of the world of objects. The self is not the brain, not the nervous system, not the aggregate of conscious states.

- 6) **Yoga:** According to Yoga, the self is an uncaused, eternal all pervading and changeless reality, which witness chance a transcendent subject distinguished by pure consciousness that can itself never become an object of knowledge. The Yoga is closely allied to the Samkhya system. It is the application of the theory of the Samkhya in practical life.
- 7) **Mimansha:** the concept of the self in Mimansha is broadly similar to that found in Nyaya and Vaishika. But there are some differences. The soul is an eternal, infinite substance, which is related to a real body in a real world and it survives death to be able to reap the consequence of its action performed here Consciousness is not the essence of the soul, but an adventitious quality which arises when some conditions are present. Knowledge is the activity of self.
- 8) **Advaita Vedanta:** According to Advaita, the atman is one's true self and it is identical with Brahman. Man is apparently composed of the body not the soul. The conception of the self set both above is chiefly based on revealed texts. The self is self-manifest in everyone. "Everyone believes that he exist, and never thinks I am not".
- 9) **Dvaita Vedanta:** According to Dvaita Vedanta the atman are infinite in numbers. The reason given to justify is the obvious differences in their experience. They are atomoc in size and as pointed out differ from each other.

According to Ramanuja, God is the soul of souls. He is also the soul of nature. He identified God with the absolute. He is the immanent inner controller, the supreme real. He holds together in unity the dependent matter and the souls are His attributes. They are the body of God who is their souls. Our souls are souls in relation to God, they become his body and He is their soul. They form this body and are inseparable forms and utterly dependent on Him. Matter and soul are called attributes of God. God is their substance, controller, supporter, the whole and the principal end. The Brihadaranyaka tells us that God is the Antaramin of the universe: " He who inhabit water, yet is within water, whom water doesnot know.... Who controls water from within, He is yourself. The inner controller, the Immortal, who controls fire from within ... who controls sky from within...who controls the air from within...who controls heaven from within...who controls the sun from within Who controls all beings from within... the Inner controller, the Immortal. God is Brahman and Brahman according to Ramanuja is a qualified unity. God is Karana Brahman. He is the supreme cause and instrumental cause of the world. The finite self is not independent, it is dependent on God. According to Ramanuja, Brahman is Savishesha. It is regarded as self with excellent attributes but is devoid of all evil qualities. Ramanuja maintains that the self can never become Brahman. It is only a part and an attributes can never become substance. God is inner substance. Though God is the inner self, both God and self are inseparable but in the

sense of bare identity. Ramanuja believes in the existence of any souls. He maintains that God is the supreme eternal soul among the eternal souls. So the souls are different from God. Though all souls are equally parts of God, some are regarded as pure and others are impure. The souls are atomic in size in relation to the supreme self. The different experience of the soul is samsaras are due to ignorance and karmas.

3. Salvation

Ramanuja criticizes Samkara's unqualified absolute identity with Nirgunana Brahman. He maintains that such a state leads only a void. According to Him, reality is not a bare identity but a determinate whole. It is the source of everything, cit (self) and acit (world), the individual souls and unconscious world are the modes of reality or God. The whole aggregate of intelligent and non-intelligent beings constitutes Brahman's body. God is the supreme self of his body and the efficient as well as the material cause it. Through God modifies himself into the universe, but imperfection does not touch Him intrinsically by the change. The system of Ramanuja is a true synthetic product of the upanisadic philosophy and religion which "exhibits the unity of the three fold system of vedantic wisdom known as tattva, hitta and purusartha." Tattva is the ultimate knowledge of Brahman as the immanent grounds of all experience. Hita is the realization Brahman and purusartha is the attainment of Brahman which is the house of eternal values like truth, goodness and beauty. A soul is essentially the nature of ultimate Knowledge and bliss. But the souls are bound on account of their ignorance. Due to ignorance the soul become associated particular bod, sense mind and life. According to Ramanuja, the state of release means the removal of ignorance by realizing its essential community of nature with God. This realization by with jnana and bhakti. According to Ramanuja, the released soul attain the nature of God, though the soul is not identical with Him. Here he insists in Jnanakanda in which the soul realizes its true nature. Ramanuja give importance to real knowledge not verbal knowledge. According to Ramanujam, liberation does not merging of the individual soul into the Absolute, but direct institutive realization of its own nature as a mode of God. This is possible by destruction of ignorance. The released soul enjoy like God, infinite consciousness and infinite bliss. It is the attainment of one's trans-empirical nature and the supreme and perfect nature of God. According to Ramanuja, salvation is attained by a soul on earth when all desire are destroyed in the cause of meditation on God. Another sense, the soul attain immortality, when past merits and demerits are destroyed and when future merits and demerits do not occurs to it, or when it attains similarity to God. The form of resealed soul consists of eight qualities. These are- freedom from sins, agelessness, deathlessness, painlessness, absence of hunger, absence of thirst, fulfillment of all desire and unobstructed will. A soul being a mode of Brahman, and being the body of it, experience its qualities with its own supreme self or experience it endowed with its suspicious qualities.

4. Findings

Ramanuja admits three realities- matter, soul and God. These three realities make up the absolute. He also identifies

God with the absolute but his accounts of the matter and soul as attributes of God in untouchable. They are contradictory to each other. In nature matter and soul cannot co-exist in God of infinite spirit. He maintains that matter and soul are substance in the themselves. But in relation to God they are maintains his attributes. Here he undermines the definition of substance which is logically must unsatisfactory. The criticism which Spinoza levelled against Descartes can be very well leveled against Ramanuja also. Even Spinoza could not solve the difficult by regarding God as the only self existing substance with infinite thought and infinite extension by his doctrine of parallelism.

5. Conclusion

Rāmānuja stands in the Indian philosophical tradition as one of its most important figures. He is the first thinker in this tradition to provide a systematic theistic interpretation of the import of the Vedas. His uncompromising stand on the side of common sense and moral realism stands as a striking contrast to stereotyped accounts of Indian philosophical thought as otherworldly and amoral. And while his significance in the history of Indian philosophy may be under appreciated, his greater influence on the character and form of popular Hinduism may also be under-recognized, despite the fact that he is regarded as a saint in many parts of Southern India. According to Karl Potter, "...Rāmānuja's tradition can be said to represent one of the main arteries through which philosophy reached down to the masses, and it may be that Viśiṣṭādvaita is today the most powerful philosophy in India in terms of numbers of adherents, whether they know themselves by that label or not" (Potter p.253). Whether Potter is correct or not, Rāmānuja is an Indian philosopher who defended the symbiosis of the spiritual, moral and practically earnest life.

Ramanuja rightly thinks of the self as a knower, doer and enjoyer or sufferer and yet of the nature of knowledge. Ramanuja does not explain fully about the distinction between the body of God and the soul of God. Soul may be either bound or liberated. Again Ramanuja cannot explain fully about the cause of bondage. But his explanation about the doctrine a means to salvation has widened the popularizing in the history of India. Again his explanation regarding the relation of God to souls is very similar to Christian conception of God.

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