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MOKṢA: THE PRAYOJANA OF ADVAITA VEDĀNTA

Shampa Roy
Assistant Professor,
Department of Philosophy,
University of GourBanga, Malda, West Bengal

Abstract: In this paper, I am trying to discuss the nature and the means of *mokṣa*, as it is regarded as the *prayojana* of Advaita Vedānta. This entire study has been based on *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* of Śaṅkarācārya and *Vedānta-Paribhāṣā* of Dharmarājadhvarīndra.

All the systems of Indian philosophy except the materialist Cārvāka and the ancient Mīmāṃsā accept *mokṣa* as the highest end of human life, so it is regarded as *prayojana* or purpose of Indian philosophy. Dharmarājadhvarīndra in his *Vedānta-Paribhāṣā* says - that which being known is desired to belong to oneself is called a purpose (*prayojana*). In this context, Uddyotkara also describes *puruṣārtha* as *prayojana* (necessity) in his *Nyāyavārttika*. Vedānta-Paribhāṣākāra describes *mokṣa* as the *parama puruṣārtha* because of its eternity and he also gives the *Śrutipramāṇa* and *Smṛtipramāṇa* in support of his view. According to the Advaitins, Knowledge of *nirguṇa Brahman*, the principle of spiritual unity is the pre-eminent means to the attainment of liberation. The unity of the *jīva* and *Brahman* caused directly through the *Śrutipramāṇa* like “*tattvamasi*” etc. This kind of direct knowledge (*aparokṣānubhūti*) removes the false earthly knowledge and leads to the ultimate end. Though Śaṅkarācārya gives importance on the *niṣkāma karma* for purification of mind but it is not the direct cause of liberation, *tattvajñāna* or *aparokṣabrahmātmaikyajñāna* only leads to the state of infinite bliss i.e. *mokṣa*. So, in Advaita Vedānta ‘*mokṣa*’ is not a new attainment, it is the extinction of the individual *self* and the realisation of absolute *self* (*paramātmā*).

Keywords: *prayojana*, *mokṣa*, *puruṣārtha*, *Brahman*, *avidyā*, *tattvajñāna*, *aparokṣānubhūti*.

All the systems of Indian philosophy except the materialist Cārvāka and the ancient Mīmāṃsā accept *mokṣa* or liberation as the highest end of human life. According to the Indian philosophers, to be free from suffering is the ultimate goal of human life and so it is regarded as the *prayojana* (purpose) in Indian philosophy. Dharmarājadhvarīndra in his *Vedānta-Paribhāṣā* gives the definition of *prayojana* - “*yadavagatam sat svavṛttitayeṣyate tat prayojanam*”¹ i.e. that which being known is desired to belong to oneself is called a purpose. In this context, Uddyotkara also describes *puruṣārtha* as *prayojana* (necessity) in his *Nyāyavārttika* and he mentioned that there are two kinds of human necessity – one is attainment of happiness and another is avoidance of sorrow. But he had also mentioned that there is another kind of division of *prayojana* and that is *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, *mokṣa*. In this connection, a different kind of definition of *puruṣārtha* is given by Dharmarājadhvarīndra in his *Vedānta-Paribhāṣā* - “*Iha khalu dharmārthakāmamokṣākhyeṣu caturvidha puruṣārtheṣu mokṣa eva parama puruṣārtha*.”² The Sanskrit term ‘*puruṣārtha*’ is a compound expression consisting of two components - ‘*puruṣa*’ and ‘*artha*’. The component ‘*puruṣa*’ means individual man. ‘*Artha*’

has various meanings like wealth, aim or purpose, motive or reason, things or object etc. But in the philosophical context 'artha' means end or object of desire. *Puruṣārtha* has been analyzed as "puruṣasya artha" i.e. objects of desire of human individuals.³ So, *puruṣārtha* literally means the end, which the *puruṣa* desires. In Indian philosophy *puruṣārtha* is defined as- "*yena prayuktaḥ puruṣa pravartate sa puruṣārtha*", i.e. *puruṣārtha* is that instigation by which human being moves to act.

According to Paribhāṣākāra happiness and absence of sorrow described as primary *prayojana* and which is the cause of this two is secondary *prayojana*. But, *dharma* (virtue), *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (physical desire) and *mokṣa* are also *puruṣārtha*, since they also produce happiness and absence of suffering. Vedānta-Paribhāṣākāra describes *mokṣa* as the *paramapuruṣārtha* because of its eternity and also gives the Śrutipramāṇa in support of his view - "*Na cha punarāvarttate*."⁴ The eternity of *mokṣa* also proved by Smṛtipramāṇa - "*Ābrahmabhuvanālokaḥpunarāvarttino Arjjuna. Māmupetyatu kaunteya punarjanma na vidyate*."⁵ But a question arises here, why the other three *puruṣārthas* viz. *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* are regarded as non-eternal? In response to this question Dharmarājādhvarīndra says that the non-eternality of *artha* and *kāma* is proved by *pratyakṣa pramāṇa*. The non-eternality of *dharma* is also instructed by the Śrutipramāṇa - "*Tat yatthehakarmachitolokaḥkṣīyate / evamevamutrapuṇyochitalokaḥ kṣīyate*."⁶ Again all the produced things must be destroyed, so they are non-eternal. *Dharma* is also produce by *yajña* (sacrifice) and must be destroyed. So, *dharma* is non-eternal like *artha* and *kāma*. But *mokṣa* is not non-eternal like *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*. *Mokṣa* is same as Brahma-realisation (*Brahmajñāna*). *Brahman* is eternal. So *mokṣa* is also eternal. Thus, Paribhāṣākāra Dharmarāja proves the superiority of *mokṣa* from the Advaita Vedāntic point of view.

Excepting to the Cārvākas, all the Indian philosophers have accepted that liberation is the ultimate end of human life (*paramapuruṣārtha*), but there are difference in their views on the nature and means of liberation. The term 'liberation' is also variously expressed by different philosophical systems, such as 'apavarga', 'mukti', 'vimukti', 'nirvāṇa', 'kaivalya', 'niḥśreyas' and 'mokṣa'. The materialist Cārvāka does not accept liberation as the *parama puruṣārtha* rather they admit only *artha* and *kāma* as the *puruṣārtha*. Though the other heterodox schools like Buddhist and Jaina philosophers are accept liberation is the ultimate end of human life. But they also differ from each other in account of the nature and the means of liberation. On the other hand, the orthodox schools like Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta philosophers are regarded liberation as the supreme end. According to Buddhist, Jaina and as well as Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya, Yoga and Mīmāṃsā, liberation is the state of absolute cessation of all kind of suffering; whereas all the Vedāntist hold that liberation is state of infinite bliss. Regarding the means of liberation there are also different views among the classical Indian philosophers. Knowledge (*jñāna*), action (*karma*), devotion (*bhakti*) and concentration of mind (*yoga*) - are the well known means to the attainment of liberation. Some philosophical schools hold that knowledge is the direct cause of liberation and others thinks that *karma* or both action and knowledge are the direct cause of liberation.

According to the Advaitins, the individual self is identical with *Brahman* but due to *avidyā* (ignorance) the self does not realize its true nature and when this ignorance is removed by the true knowledge then the self realises its own nature. *Mokṣa* is not a new attainment; rather the self is eternally liberated but, due to *avidyā* it becomes bounded. The *Ātman* is eternally liberated; it is its essential nature but it hidden by *avidyā* and this ignorance is also not permanent. It is like the rope- snake illusion. So, Individuality is due to ignorance and liberation is extinction of the individual self and the realisation of absolute self (*paramātmā*). By the true knowledge of the self this ignorance is removed. According to the Advaitins liberation is not produced because it cannot be achieved by action, the knowledge of the identity of the self with *Brahman* is only acquired by immediate self-realization (*aparokṣānubhūti*).

According to the Advaitins, liberation is the state of infinite bliss. It is a state of intuitive realization of identity of the individual self with Brahman (*sachchidānanda*). In the state of *mokṣa* the *jīva* realized his own true nature i.e. *sat-cit-ānandasvarūpa* or *Brahmasvarupa*. So, *mokṣa* means realization of *Brahmasvarupa*. But it is not the case that in the state of *mokṣa* one can free from something which to be given up or one can free to gain something worth to be achieved. Because, Brahman is “*heyopādeya shūnyatvam*”. In this context Śaṅkarācārya says that “*heyopādeyashūnam brahmātmātāvagamād eva sarvakleśprahāṇātpuruṣārthasiddheḥ*”⁷ i.e. *Brahman* is beyond acceptance and rejection, and the total eradication of all sorrows comes about a result of the realization of the self as Brahman which is the ultimate human goal. And this ultimate goal is an accomplished fact according to the Advaitins. So, *mokṣa* is not a new achievement. It is the state of self-realization or Brahman-realization. *Mokṣa* is identical with *Brahman* and as *Brahman* is eternal this is why *mokṣa* is also eternal. Therefore, Śruti says that- “*vimuktaśca vimucyate*”⁸ i.e. one who has already liberated, is liberated. In this context, Dharmarājādvārīndra also says in his *Vedānta-Paribhāṣā* - “*Ānandātmaka Brahmaprāptiśca mokṣaḥ śokanivṛttiśca*”⁹ i.e. ‘*mokṣa*’ means ‘attainment of *Brahman*, which is bliss’ and as also ‘the cessation of suffering’.

From the above verse Dharmarāja also clarify that the state of *mokṣa* is a positive state and not negative. Because, as Śruti says, “He who knows that Brahman becomes Brahman itself”¹⁰. So, *mokṣa* is identical with Brahman and the individual self who realized his own nature which *Brahman* itself, has attain the culmination of bliss; because Brahman is *ānandasvarūpa* and *Brahman* is the only absolute bliss (*niratiśayasukha*); in this stage there is no distinction between the knower and the bliss. Here Dharmarāja also mention the Śrutipramāṇa-“*taratiśokam ātmavid*.”¹¹ This means the state of *mokṣa* is purely positive; there has no sorrow, no negativity. In this regard, Dharmarāja also mention that ‘*lokāntaraprāpti*’ i.e. going to the world or happiness in the heaven - is not regarded as ultimate end because this would lead to a return to the liberated.

Śaṅkarācārya define the nature of *mokṣa* in his *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* - “*idaṁ tu pāramārthikam kūṭastha nityam, vyomavat sarvavyāpi, sarvavikriyā rahitam, nityatrptam, niravayavam, svayamjyotiḥ svabhāvam. Yatra dharmādharmasahakāryeṇa, kālatrayam cha, naupāvaritetadatataśharīratvam mokṣākhyam*.”¹² i.e. *mokṣa* is the highest end, it is eternal, but *mokṣa* is not changingly eternal or *pariṇāmīnitya*; it is unchangingly eternal. Changingly eternal means which goes on changing but at the same time appears to be the same, like the *guṇas* - *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* of Sāṃkhya philosophy, which are constantly changing though they are eternal in nature. On the other hand, *kūṭasthanitya* means which does not change in any way and continues to be of the same nature, like the *parabrahman* of AdvaitaVedānta. So, in Śaṅkara’s philosophy *mokṣa* is as same as *Brahman*, it ultimately real and unchangingly eternal. *Mokṣa* is all pervading like ether (*ākāśa*) but beyond it, devoid of all transformations, it is the state of absolute satisfaction, self luminous by nature, *mokṣa* is that unembodiedness where the three periods of time does not exists and virtuous and vicious deeds cease along with their effects i.e. *sukha* and *duḥkha*; so, *mokṣa* is not an effect of any action and it being unrelated to virtue and vice.

The opponent (*pūrvapakṣa*) may raised an objection that if liberation means attainment of bliss and cessation of sorrow then it have a beginning and then it have to produced and if it is produced then it is not regarded as the eternal state; or if it is without beginning then there cannot be no desire for liberation. So, in one sense if *mokṣa* is an eternal state and it is identical with *Brahman* then *mokṣa* cannot be a goal to be achieved. Because, the *self* in its true nature is liberated. But in another sense, all the philosophical schools has admitted that the *self* is bounded and freedom from the bondage is the highest human goal, and also in the Advaita philosophy it discussed that freedom from the grief of *avidyā* is the ultimate end of human life. So, here the problem is, on the one hand human being is eternally free and on the other hand he also seeks freedom from the bondage, how it is possible?

In response to this objection, Dharmarājādvārīndra says in his *Vedānta-Paribhāṣa* that, “*loke’pi prāptaprāpti prihṛta-prihāryoḥ prayojanatvṃ dṛṣṭmeva*”¹³. In this verse Dharmarāja intend to say that although liberation is regarded as identical with Brahman but due to ignorance the *jīvas* does not realized its own nature and for this reason he inclined to attain liberation which is already attained. Dharmarāja gives some instances for proving it. In our daily life we are also intend to achieve something which is already achieved, like the gold nickels which is already in one’s hand but he has been forgotten, and by the instruction of a trustworthy person saying that “the gold is in your hand”, makes him feel that achievement which is already achieved. Or when someone has mistaken a garland twining around one’s leg for a snake, and by a trustworthy person he realized that it is not a snake, then he actually get rid of the snake which is not at all got rid of. Like this above instance, liberation is the ‘attainment of bliss’ which is already attained and ‘avoidance of sorrow’ which is already avoided. So, in Advaita philosophy *mokṣa* is not a new attainment or *aprāptasyaprāpti*, rather it is the realization of one’s own nature i.e. *prāptasyaprāpti*.

Regarding the means of *mokṣa* the Advaitins says that Knowledge of *nirguṇa Brahman*, the principle of spiritual unity is the pre-eminent means to the attainment of liberation. Knowledge is considered to be the chief means of liberation because the intuitive knowledge of identity of the *jīva* and *Brahman* (*aparokṣabrahmātmaikyajñāna*) is its cause. The knowledge of difference is ignorance which can be removed only by right knowledge of *Brahman*. Śāstras only generates this right knowledge. The knowledge of *Brahman* which leads to eternal bliss does not depend on the performance of any act, because action, whether secular or Vedic, can be done, misdones or left undone. But, knowledge leaves no option to us for its being this or that or for its existence or non-existence. It is not in our hands to make, unmake, or change the knowledge. Because, *jñāna* is *vastutantra*. But due to the abstraction (*vikṣepa*) of mind the knowledge from *śabdapramāṇa* is indirectly generated. If the mind is purified by the practice of *niṣkāma karma* and through the *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* the false ideas (*viparītabhāvanā* and *asambhāvanā*) about the *Brahman* is removed. After that, the man who acquired the four necessary pre-requisites (*sādhana-catustaya*) i.e. - (a) discrimination between things permanent and transient (*nityānityavastuviveka*), (b) renunciation of the enjoyment of the fruits of action in this world and hereafter (*ihāmūtraphala- bhogavirāga*), (c) six treasures, such as control of the mind (*śama*), control of senses and organs (*dama*), the withdrawing of the self (*uparati*), forbearance (*titikṣa*), self-settledness (*samādhāna*) and faith (*śraddhā*), (d) the desire for spiritual freedom (*mumukṣutva*), then he realize the unity of the *jīva* and *Brahman* directly through the *Śrutipramāṇa* like “*tattvamasī*”. This kind of direct knowledge (*aparokṣānubhūti*) removed the false earthly knowledge and leads to the ultimate end. So, according to the Advaitins liberation is not produced because it cannot be achieved by action, the knowledge of the identity of the *self* with *Brahman* is only acquired by immediate self-realization (*aparokṣānubhūti*). Both Maharshi Bādarāyaṇa and Śāṅkarācārya state that only knowledge is the direct cause of liberation. For this purpose Maharṣi Bādarāyaṇa states in *Brahmasūtra*-“*Puruṣārtha atah savdāt iti Bādarāyaṇaḥ*”¹⁴.

Āchārya Śāṅkara also repeatedly asserts that the Absolute can be realized through knowledge and knowledge alone, *karma* or *upāsana* are subsidiary. They may help us in urging to know the reality and they may prepare us for that knowledge by purifying our mind (*sattvashuddhi*), but ultimately it is knowledge alone which, by destroying ignorance, the root cause of the world, can enable us to be one with the Absolute. Knowledge and action are opposite like light and darkness. They are contradictory and are poles apart. So, it is impossible to combine knowledge with action. Though Śāṅkarācārya admits the importance of *niṣkāma karma* for purification of mind, but *kāmya karma* is opposite to knowledge. Because, this kind of action is non-eternal, their fruits are non-eternal and performance of duties leads to the attainment of heaven, which is also non-eternal. But *Brahman* is eternal and it cannot be attained by performance of duty which is non-eternal. So, according to the Advaita Vedāntins, *tattvajñāna* or *aparokṣabrahmātmaikyajñāna* only leads to *mokṣa*, which is the state of cessation of suffering and the attainment of the absolute bliss of Brahman. In this regard, Dharmarājādvārīndra says that “*tad evaṃ brahmajñānad mokṣaḥ. sa cha anartha nivṛtti niratiśaya*”.

brahmānanda eva prāptiścheti siddham prayojanam.”¹⁵ Thus, the purpose of Advaita Vedānta has been established.

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