



Interpretation Of Sthitaprajña In The Bhagavadgītā: A Comparative Study Of Śaṅkarācārya And Rāmānujācārya

1Sanjeev Kumar

1Postgraduate Student

1Department of SBSPCR (Hindu Studies), Nalanda University, India

2 Jyotika

2Postgraduate Student

2Department of SBSPCR (Hindu Studies), Nalanda University, India

Abstract

In the 2nd chapter of the Bhagavadgītā introduces the idea of 'Sthitaprajña' as a person who is self-realized, possessing a stable intellect, and who remains unaffected by attachment-dissatisfaction, joy-pain, aversion, and anger. This research article offers a comparative analysis of the interpretations of verses 2.55 to 2.57 of the Gītā by Śaṅkarācārya and Rāmānujācārya. Śaṅkarācārya focuses on knowledge, detachment, and illusionism rooted in Advaita Vedānta, whereas Rāmānujācārya views devotion, dedication, and divine grace as foundational for self-realization in Viśiṣṭādvaita. Although the perspectives of both Acharyas may vary, their objective remains focused on self-realization and salvation. This article demonstrates that both knowledge and devotion play significant roles in the process of becoming a Sthitaprajña. This research enhances Vedantic discussions and motivates contemporary individuals to attain self-discipline and inner tranquility through the combined path of knowledge and devotion.

Keywords: Sthitaprajña, Bhagavad Gītā, Śaṅkarācārya, Rāmānujācārya, Advaita Vedānta, Bhaktiyoga, Self-realization

Introduction

Bhagavadgītā is a fundamental text of Indian philosophy and spirituality, and also a part of the prasthānatraya, which not only discusses sāmkhya and karmayoga, but also answers the deepest questions of life. In the second chapter, Śrī kṛṣṇa's depiction of the Sthitaprajña Puruṣa in the state of Arjuna's mental disturbance is very important. This description not only presents a spiritual ideal, but also symbolizes inner balance, discretion and self-control. A 'Sthitaprajña' is a man whose intellect is steady, who has control over

the senses, and who is neither indulged in pleasure nor disturbed by pain. The characteristics described by Śrī kṛṣṇa in response to Arjuna's four questions (2.55–2.57) have been presented by Adi Śaṅkarācārya and Rāmānujācārya in the light of their respective philosophies. This paper comparatively reviews the concept of Sthitaprajña through Śaṅkarācārya's Advaita Vedānta and Rāmānujācārya's Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta. Śaṅkarācārya, while accepting the non-duality of the soul and the Brahman, emphasizes on detachment, knowledge and a vision free from illusion, while Rāmānujācārya considers devotion, dedication and God's grace as the basic steps to steady wisdom. In modern life, where external attractions and mental unrest are strong, this ideal person of the Gītā inspires inner peace, devotion to duty and self-realization. Therefore, this study is not just a philosophical discussion, but also a guide to life-view.

Second chapter of the Bhagavadgītā, 'Sthitaprajña' is mentioned as a person who is self-established, who has a steady mind, who has control over the senses, and who is free from mental disorders (fluctuations) like love-hate, happiness-sadness, anger-fear. This concept is not only related to self-knowledge, but is also central to the entire philosophical fabric of the Gītā. Arjuna, when he loses his concentration due to mental distress on the battlefield, asks kṛṣṇa:

arjuna uvācha
sthita-prajñasya kā bhāṣhā samādhi-sthasya keśhava
sthita-dhīḥ kim prabhāṣheta kim āsīta vrajeta kim (Gītā 2.54)

Arjuna wants to know what a person with a concentrated mind is like - how he speaks, how he walks, and how he behaves. Śrī kṛṣṇa answers this by explaining the characteristics of a Sthitaprajña person in verses 2.55 to 2.72.

śhrī bhagavān uvācha
prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvān pārtha mano-gatān
ātmany-evātmanā tuṣhṭaḥ sthita-prajñas tadochyate

Here the first characteristic of a Sthitaprajña is the renunciation of desires and self-satisfaction. A person who is satisfied in the soul and does not seek happiness in external things is called a Sthitaprajña. In the next verses Śrī kṛṣṇa explains that a Sthitaprajña person is neither agitated by sorrow nor indulged in happiness; he is free from attachment, fear and anger (2.56), and is equanimous in good and bad (2.57). This state is not merely external control, but a state of the soul, where a person becomes stable-minded by abandoning attachment to actions through the yoga of intellect. In the Gītā, the concept of Sthitaprajña arises from the coordination of self-restraint, equanimity, detachment and knowledge. This ideal person is not just a yogi, but a prudent self-knowledgeable person who remains stable in every duality of life. So Sthitaprajña is not just a philosophical ideal, but the center of practical sadhana, where the Karmayoga, Jñānayoga and Bhaktiyoga of the Gītā unite and pave the way for self-improvement.

Philosophical Backgrounds of Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja

Śaṅkarācārya (8th century) is considered to be a very influential master of Indian philosophy, who reestablished Advaita Vedānta. His central principle is that Ātman and Brahman are non-different, and that the world appears real due to Māyā, while in reality only Brahman is true: "brahma satyaṃ jaganmithyā jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ". In Śaṅkarācārya's philosophy, knowledge (jñānayoga) is the path to liberation. He believes that due to avidyā (ignorance) the living being identifies itself with the body and mind, which gives rise to suffering, attachment, hatred, etc. But as soon as this living being recognizes its true nature – the Self as Brahman – then it becomes liberated. According to him, a Sthitaprajña is one who has controlled the senses and the mind and has experienced the Self as Brahman. For Śaṅkarācārya, detachment and discrimination are pre-conditions of self-knowledge.

Rāmānujācārya (11th–12th century) is considered to be the main proponent of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta. Refuting Advaita, he propounds that though Brahman is one, it has speciality (uniqueness) – that is, the ātman, the world and Brahman exist as an integral entity despite being separate. According to him, there is an eternal relationship between the ātman and Brahman, and the ātman is a part of the Supreme Being. In Rāmānujācārya's philosophy, devotion (Bhaktiyoga) is considered to be the main means of salvation. He believes that the ātman can attain liberation only through the grace of God and complete surrender. Knowledge, for him, is only a means to strengthen the role of devotion. Sthitaprajña, in his view, is one who performs his duties with complete faith and dedication towards God, and offers everything to God without any expectation of reward. They consider Sthitaprajña not as passive renunciation, but as active religious devotion with devotion.

Comparative Commentary on Verse 2.55

Śaṅkarācārya's - Śaṅkarācārya explains this verse from the point of view of Advaita Vedānta. According to him, the root cause of "desire" is – Avidyā (ignorance), due to which the living being associates itself with body-mind-intellect. When a person knows the integral nature of the soul and Brahman through Brahma vidyā, then he knows that this entire world is Māyā and the soul is the only truth. As a result of this self-knowledge, the person renounces all "intuitive" desires, because he realizes that they do not bring any permanent happiness. In this state, he does not depend on external objects, but experiences complete satisfaction in the soul itself. According to Śaṅkarācārya, this balanced state - where there is no desire left and no expectation of happiness from external objects - is the state of 'Sthitaprajña'. This knowledgeable person later becomes a Jīvanamukta.

Rāmānujācārya's - Rāmānujācārya interprets this verse in the spirit of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta. He sees "renunciation of desires" as the renunciation of selfish desires, not as a complete renunciation of the world or duty. According to him, Sthitaprajña is one who does not desire anything other than God, and feels the soul satisfied in its eternal relationship with the Supreme Being. Rāmānujācārya interprets 'ātmany-evātmanā tuṣṭaḥ' to mean that the soul is satisfied in its soul, which is a part of God, by God's grace and

devotion. This self-satisfaction is the result of spiritual surrender and love, not intellectual detachment. Renunciation of desires should be motivated by the yearning to attain God, not just for the soul.

Comparative Commentary on Verse 2.56

Śaṅkarācārya's - Śaṅkarācārya explains this verse in the perspective of jñānayoga and Advaita philosophy. According to him, both sorrow and happiness are illusory, because they occur in the realm of Māyā. The person who has known the soul as Brahman knows that neither sorrow nor happiness is permanent – both are changeable and have no effect on the soul. “*anudvigna-manāḥ*”—one whose mind is not disturbed in the face of suffering—Śaṅkarācārya considers this to be the attainment of stability of mind and Tattvajñāna. Similarly, “*vigata-sprīhaḥ*” is taken to mean that the wise man has lost all desire for happiness because he has realized that the Self is the Supreme Bliss. “*vīta-rāga-bhaya-krodhaḥ*”—the absence of raga (attraction), fear (insecurity due to ignorance), and anger (reaction to obstacles)—can only be possible in one who has attained the knowledge of the Self. Śaṅkarācārya calls this state the state of “*sthitadhi*”, where the intellect is no longer wavering, and the muni (contemplative enlightened person) is detached from the world even while living in it.

Rāmānujācārya's - Rāmānujācārya interprets this verse from the perspective of Bhaktiyoga. According to him, it is natural to experience pain and pleasure, but a person of steady wisdom does not get involved in the duality of these experiences because he has fixed his mind on God. “*anudvigna-manāḥ*” — that is, his faith in God does not waver even in pain. “*vigata-sprīhaḥ*” — he is free from the desire for pleasure, because he has found the source of ultimate bliss in God. “*Rāga*” here, according to Ramanuja, is related to passions — that is, that which creates attachment to a beloved object. “*Bhaya*” arises when there is a fear of losing an object or a relationship. And “*Krodha*” appears when desires are obstructed. Rāmānujācārya says that all these disorders are pacified only by devotion and love towards God. A sage of steady wisdom, according to him, is one who, while performing his duties, remains single-mindedly focused on God, and fixes his mind in equanimity. This state of steady wisdom is not inactivity, but a life imbued with self-control and devotion resulting from surrender to God.

Comparative Commentary on Verse 2.57

Śaṅkarācārya's - Adi Śaṅkarācārya explains this verse in the light of selfless discretion and self-knowledge. The state of “*anabhisnehaḥ*”—that is, free from attachment to all objects, persons or experiences—is possible only in a person who has recognized the distinction between ātman and anātman. According to Śaṅkarācārya, both auspicious and inauspicious are changeable and are born of illusion, hence a knowledgeable person is not affected by them. “*nābhinandati*” – does not rejoice at the attainment of good, because he knows that this too is impermanent. and “*na dvesti*” — does not hate when he gets bad, because he accepts it as the natural result of his actions. The root of this state of self is sakshi bhaav, where the person raises his mind above the flow of external events. Śaṅkarācārya calls this state “*prajñā pratiṣṭhitā*”—where the intellect is now fixed in the soul and the dialectical states of the world cannot affect it.

Rāmānujācārya's - Rāmānujācārya explains this verse as devotional dispassion. According to him, "anabhisneha" is one who prefers attachment to God over attachment to objects, relationships or experiences. He offers all actions and their fruits to God, so when he gets good, he considers it as God's grace and does not feel proud, and when he gets bad, he has faith in God's will, so he does not develop hatred. For Ramanuja, this state is the result of surrender, faith and devotion – it is not mere mental detachment, but a state of active God consciousness. He holds that 'steadfast wisdom' is one whose intellect is rooted in the will of God, and who accepts every situation with grace. According to him, the same attitude in response to good and evil is not detachment, but stability in devotion to God – it is the highest form of bhakti yoga.

Key Differences and Commonalities between Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja

Both Śaṅkarācārya and Rāmānujācārya have elaborated on the concept of Sthitaprajña described in 2nd chapter of the Bhagavadgītā. Although both the ācārya come from different philosophical traditions – Śaṅkarācārya is the founder of Advaita Vedānta and Rāmānujācārya is of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta – yet some basic similarities are also visible in them.

Commonalities:

- Self-restraint and Sthitaprajña – Both the Acharyas agree that a Sthitaprajña person has complete control over the senses and the mind.
- Renunciation of desires – Both believe that being free from personal desires is the basic condition of Sthitaprajña.
- A life free from duality – Rising above happiness-sorrow, love-hatred etc. is essential in the view of both.
- Means of attaining salvation – According to both, Sthitaprajñata is an essential condition for self-improvement and salvation.

Main Differences:

Figure 1

Topic	Śaṅkarācārya (Advaita Vedānta)	Rāmānujācārya (Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta)
Nature of Philosophy	Non-dualism of Nirguṇa Brahman; Jīva and Brahman are identical	Qualified non-dualism of Saguṇa Brahman; Jīva is a part of Brahman
Means to Liberation (Mokṣa)	<i>Jñāna (knowledge) and Vairāgya (detachment)</i>	<i>Bhakti (devotion) and Surrender to God</i>
Renunciation of Desires	Through Vairāgya born from Self-knowledge	Through loving devotion and faith in God
Definition of Sthitaprajña	One who has realized Brahman and sees the world as illusory	One who has unshakable faith in God and dedicates all duties to Him
View on Nature (Prakṛti)	Covered by Māyā and illusory	Manifestation of Brahman; real and purposeful in relation to the soul

Conclusion

The concept of 'Sthitaprajña' is presented in the second chapter of the Bhagavadgītā as an ideal person who attains mental stability, self-control and equanimity through self-knowledge or devotion to God. The picture of Sthitaprajña that Śrī kṛṣṇa has drawn in his answers to Arjuna's four questions is not of any sanyasi only, but of every person who rises above the dualities of life – happiness-sorrow, love-hatred, fear-anger – and becomes situated in the soul or God. Śaṅkarācārya and Rāmānujācārya, though coming from different philosophical traditions, both consider Sthitaprajña as a traveller on the path of liberation. Śaṅkarācārya considers it to be a state of detachment and discretion arising from Brahmayidyā, where the soul becomes absorbed in Brahma and becomes detached from the world. Rāmānujācārya sees it as the culmination of devotion and surrender, where the soul becomes completely immersed in the will of God. This comparative study highlights the fact that the teachings of the Gītā are not limited to philosophical differences but they address the deeper spiritual and moral aspects of human life. In today's turbulent, pleasure-seeking and confused life, this concept of Sthithaprajna gives the message of self-restraint, prudence and surrender - which not only leads a man to salvation but also to a sense of balance, peace and purpose in life.

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