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‘Mokṣa’ in ‘The Brahmasūtra-s’ as interpreted by Rāmānujācārya

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Abstract

Brahmasūtra-s by *Bādarāyaṇa Vyāsa* forms part of the triple canon (*Prasthāna Trayī*) of Vedānta. In *Brahmasūtra-s* *Bādarāyaṇa Vyāsa* strings together the leading concepts of *Vedānta* in an orderly manner. It has four chapters. The first chapter is *Samanvayādhyāya* wherein various *Upaniṣadic* statements are harmonised with the ultimate reality of Brahman. It is established that the *Brahman* is the nature of existence-consciousness-bliss and the cause of the universe. *Avirodhādhyāya* is the second one, in which the *Upaniṣadic* statements about *Brahman* are proved through logic or *Yukti* and through refutation of other schools of philosophy. The third one is *Sādhanādhyāya* reveals details of various *Vidyā-s* and *Upāsānā-s* leading to the attainment of the Ultimate Reality. *Phalādhyāya* is the fourth chapter which elucidates the effect of realising the Ultimate Reality. Most schools of the Indian philosophy generally concede that *Mokṣa* is the supreme goal of life (*Parama-Puruṣārtha*). Yet there are varied views regarding the concept of *Mokṣa*, its nature and the means to attain it. This paper focuses on the concept of *Mokṣa* in *Brahmasūtra-s* and its nature as interpreted by *Rāmānujācārya* in his commentary titled *Śrībhāṣya*. It also brings out that *Parama Bhakti* and *Prapatti* are the ways to attain *Mokṣa*.

Keywords: *Mokṣa*, *Mukti*, *Parama Puruṣārtha*, *Parama Bhakti*, *Prapatti*, summum bonum, bondage, liberation, emancipation

Introduction

The *Upaniṣad-s*, the *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā* and the *Brahmasūtra-s* comprise the triple canon (*Prasthāna Trayī*) of *Vedānta*, on which all great *Ācārya-s* have commented. The *Upaniṣad-s* mark the summits of the *Veda*. The *Bhagavadgītā* embodying the teachings of *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* occupies a unique place in the *Vedantic* tradition. The *Brahmasūtra-s* is also known as *Vedāntasūtra-s*. *Bādarāyaṇa Vyāsa*, the compiler or arranger of the Vedas has summarised the teachings of the *Upaniṣad-s* in the *Brahmasūtra-s* wherein, he strings together the leading concepts of *Vedānta* in an orderly manner. It has four chapters and the fourth chapter viz. *Phalādhyāya* elucidates the effect of realising the Ultimate Reality mainly *Jīvanmukti* (liberation while being embodied) and *Videhamukti* (liberation after the fall of the body). The five main *Ācārya-s* namely *Śaṅkara*, *Rāmānuja*, *Madhva*, *Nimbārka* and *Vallabha* have written their *Bhāṣya* on the *Brahmasūtra-s*. Though the source text is same, the interpretations by different *Ācārya-s* vary. The present article is focussed on the interpretation by *Rāmānujācārya*.

Brahman in Brahmasūtra-s as per Rāmānuja

Rāmānuja founded the *Viśiṣṭādvaita* philosophical system. He mentions that he has closely followed the interpretations of the *Brahmasūtra-s* as given by *Bodhāyana* (under *Bhāṣya on Brahmasūtra* I.1.1).

He establishes that *Brahman* and *Īśvara* are one and the same and neither is formless and differenceless. *Cit* and *Acit* are His real body and states that He can only be proved through scriptures. As it is said in the *Sūtra - Śāstrayonitvāt* || (*Brahmasūtra* I.1.3), scriptures are the source of right knowledge of *Brahman*. He says that *Karma Yoga* and *Jñāna Yoga* only help to purify the mind, as a preparation for *Bhakti-Yoga*. Brahman can be approached either through *Bhakti* or through *Prapatti*.

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Rāmānuja identifies God with the Absolute and also calls Him as qualified *Brahman* (*Saviśeṣa*). *Janmādyasya Yataḥ* || (*Brahmasūtra* I.1.2), means ‘from whom all these beings originate, by whom they are sustained and into whom they merge at the time of *Pralaya*’. If *Brahman* were to be *Nirviśeṣa*, then this *Sūtra* needed to read as ‘from whom the illusion of world is manifested’ which has no meaning.

Bondage and Liberation

The relation between soul and *Karma* is beginningless, as per *Rāmānuja*. Due to *Karma*, the soul becomes associated with a certain body, senses, mind and life. This is Bondage. All *Jīvas* may be eligible for *Mokṣa* but one should be desirous of it and carry out *Sādhanā* as prescribed, to attain *Mokṣa* by God’s grace. He showers His grace on the sincere *Mumukṣu*.

Destruction of all *Karma*-s to acquire innate purity and the dawning of the Grace of God which transforms constant meditation into immediate intuition of God, both happen simultaneously. Thus soul cannot acquire innate purity until it is associated with *Karma*-s and thus as per *Rāmānuja*, there can be no state called *Jīvanmukti*. *Rāmānuja* also states that bondage is due to the contact of soul with body and hence liberation is only possible when the contact is broken. Also it is not possible for a person to realise that his body is an illusion, while he is still embodied, as the feeling of body cannot co-exist with the feeling of illusion. Thus *Jīvanmukti* cannot be established logically.

Parama-Bhakti and Prapatti

He who knows *Brahman* attains the highest, as said in *Taittirīya Upaniṣad - Brahavidāpnoti Param* || (II.1.1). This means *Jñāna* or knowledge of *Brahman* is the means to *Mokṣa*. *Jñāna* developed into the form of steadfast meditation or *Bhakti* constitutes the means to *Mokṣa*. The *Śravaṇa*, *Manana* and *Nididhyāsana* undertaken with intense love of God (*Bhakti*) will make the *Jīva* eligible for the grace of God. When the mind goes towards the Lord instead of sense objects, even without any external stimulation and as this is intensified, the devotee feels great attraction to Lord, *Bhakti* develops to its final stage *Parama-Bhakti*.

Prapatti is considered an independent path, provided the devotee is able to cultivate the right mental attitude with unshakable faith in God. This will make the grace of God operative on *Jīva* immediately. Therefore *Prapatti* is superior to *Bhakti* as per *Rāmānuja*. This type of faith leading to absolute self-surrender is rarely found either among masses or the classes.

Nature of Mokṣa

As per *Rāmānuja*, *Mokṣa* is a positive state of existence for the *Jīva* in a supra-mundane realm (*Parama-Pada*). The liberated soul becomes similar to *Brahman* and enjoys infinite bliss and consciousness while retaining its individualityⁱ. *Jīva* becomes omniscient and is capable of comprehending *Brahman* in all splendour. Once *Jīva* reaches this state there is no return to the state of bondage (*Na Ca Punarāvartate*). *Paramātman* is full of love and compassion for the *Jīva*-s once liberated and hence they will never be returned to bondage. The *Śruti*-s reaffirm the truth that there is no return to bondage under any circumstancesⁱⁱ. “All worlds up to that of *Brahman* are subject to return but attaining Me there is no birth again”ⁱⁱⁱ. He also says that the liberated soul having destroyed its *Karma*-s and established in the experience of *Brahman* cannot have any possible desire. Since the desires are ceased of a liberated soul, it does not return to the world.

Bādarāyaṇa holds the view that the released soul can exist in both ways – with or without body, by his will, as in the case of twelve days sacrifice, as said in *Dvādaśāhavadubhayavidham Bādarāyaṇoataḥ* || (*Brahmasūtra* IV.4.12). *Rāmānuja* explains that the liberated soul can assume such a body (totally free from *Karma*-s) which is its own creation, or remain without body if it so desires. Thus there is no conflict between *Śruti* texts, one speaking of the bodily form of liberated soul while other requiring the physical body to be cast off before liberation.

Omniscience is not something newly produced in the state of liberation, *Jīva* by its nature is omniscient but its omniscience is not manifest in the state of bondage owing to *Karma*-s. With the removal of *Karma*-s, the true nature of self is manifested, just as no new lustre is produced by polishing a gem but its original sheen is manifested (under *Bhāṣya on Brahmasūtra* IV.4.3).

Those who go to the other world, after having known the self in this world, have unobstructed movement in all the worlds^{iv}. A liberated soul, having attained the nature of *Brahman*, obtains all the enjoyments^v. A knower of *Brahman*, having been relieved of this world, wanders enjoying at will and assuming forms according to his desire^{vi}. That knower having been relieved of the merits and demerits, becomes pure and attains similarity^{vii}. From these *Śruti*-s, *Rāmānuja* concludes that liberated soul does not merge with *Brahman* and maintains its individual existence and only attains similarity with *Brahman*. All individual souls of divine, human and animals become alike in the state of *Mokṣa*. The personality attained due to the relation with body is not everlasting.

Rāmānuja says a knower of *Brahman* attains the state of *Mokṣa* only after the fall of his body i.e. *Videhamukti*. After the fall of the *body*, the soul of the knower of *Brahman* leaves the body through *Suṣumnā Nāḍi* and adopts the *Devayāna* path to the world of *Brahman* (under *Bhāṣya on Brahmasūtra* IV.2.7).

Rāmānuja talks about the five stages of *Mokṣa*; the first stage is *Sālokya* when the liberated soul attains the world of *Brahman*; the second stage is *Sārṣṭi* when the liberated soul enjoys the affluences like *Brahman*; *Sāmīpya* is the third stage when the liberated soul attains the nearness of *Brahman*; the fourth stage is *Sārūpya* when the liberated soul attains the nature of *Brahman* and becomes like *Brahman*; the fifth and the final stage is *Sāyujya* when the liberated soul enters *Brahman*. According to *Rāmānuja*, even in this highest state of *Sāyujya Mokṣa*, the liberated soul does not lose its individuality. The liberated souls possess completeness like the *Brahman* except for the two special powers of *Brahman* – one is His all-pervasiveness and second is His capability to create and control the world. The individual soul becoming free from all *Karma*-s, acquires the power to perceive the essential nature of *Brahman* intuitively but does not possess the powers of controlling the world of beings and *Brahman* alone has this power^{viii}. *Jagadyāpāravarjam Prakaraṇādasannihitattvācca* || (*Brahmasūtra* IV.4.17), means the released souls possess all powers of the *Brahman* except the cosmic activity, because of subject matter (He is the subject) and non-proximity. Thus the equality with the *Brahman* does not extend to cosmic activity. Hence it is concluded that the power of the liberated soul is devoid of cosmic activity, as mentioned in *Bhogamātrasāmyalingācca* || (*Brahmasūtra* IV.4.21). Thus the souls cannot be identified with the *Brahman* even in *Sāyujya Mokṣa* and individuality remains. *Rāmānuja* puts it as the liberated souls cherish to serve the *Brahman* for ever.

In the words of Radhakrishnan - *Rāmānuja* holds together all the different elements from various knowledge sources – the *Upaniṣads*, the *Āgamas*, the *Purāṇas* and the *Dīvyā Prabandham*, in the indefinable unity of religious experience. The philosophic spirit was strong in him so too was religious need. He tries his best to reconcile the demands of the religious feeling with the claims of logical thinking. *Rāmānuja*'s influence was visible throughout the later history of Hinduism. The movements of *Madhva*, *Vallabha*, *Caitanya*, *Ramananda*, *Kabir*, *Nanak* and the reform organisation of *Brahmoism* are largely indebted to *Rāmānuja*'s theistic idealism^{ix}.

Conclusion

Mukti is freedom from the individualistic outlook and the attainment of divine vision and divine bliss. The sense of separateness of the *Jīva* alone is abolished and not the *Jīva* itself. According to *Rāmānuja*, in *Mokṣa*, the individuality of the soul is not lost but only obstructing bondages are destroyed, because the loss of soul's individuality will mean the destruction of the real soul which is not possible. A liberated soul does not become identical with *Paramātmān* but becomes omniscient and always has a realisation of *Paramātmān*. Soul enjoys all the rest except the two exclusive powers of Brahman i.e. all-pervasiveness and creation of cosmos. As per *Rāmānuja*, if individuality of *Jīva* in *Mokṣa* is not accepted, it cannot be a real *Puruṣārtha* or *Summon Bonum* of spiritual life, worth striving for.

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End Notes

ⁱ R. D. Karmarkar, Śrī Bhāṣyam of Rāmānuja - English Translation, University of Pune, Pune, 1959, p.122 – Iti Muktasya Svarūpa | 'Tadbhāvaḥ' Brahmanoh Bhāvaḥ Svabhāvaḥ | Na Tu Svarūpaikyam | (under commentary of Brahmasūtra I.1.1); George Thibaut, The Vedānta-Sūtras with the commentary of Rāmānuga – English Translation, Part III, The Clarendon Press, 1904, p.100 - This describes the state of the released soul. Its being is the being, the character or nature, of Brahman; but this does not mean absolute oneness of nature; because in this latter case the second being would be out of place and the Śloka would contradict what had been said before.

ⁱⁱ George Thibaut, The Vedānta-Sūtras with the commentary of Rāmānuga – English Translation, Part III, The Clarendon Press, 1904, p.770, commentary under of Anuvṛttīḥ Śābdānūvṛttīḥ Śābdāt || Brahmasūtra IV.4.22

ⁱⁱⁱ Ābrahmabhuvanālokāḥ Punarāvartino Arjuna | Māmupetya Tu Kaunteya Punarjanma Na Vidyate || 'Śrim*2Q adbhagavadgītā VIII.16.

^{iv} Tadyatheha Karmajito Lokāḥ Kṣīyate Evamevāmutra Punyajito Lokāḥ Kṣīyate Tadya Ihātmānamanuvidya Vrajantyetāmśca Satyān Kāmānsteśām Sarveṣu Lokeṣvakāmacāro Bhavatyatha Ya Ihātmānamanuvidya Vrajantyetāmśca Satyān Kāmānsteśām Sarveṣu Lokeṣu Kāmacāro Bhavati || Chāndogya Upaniṣad VIII.1.6.

^v So Aṣṇute Sarvān Kāmān Saha Brahmanā Vipāściteti. || Taittirīya Upaniṣad II.1.1.

^{vi} Imāmlōkānkāmānni Kāmarūpyanusamcāran Etasāmāgāyannāste. || Taittirīya Upaniṣad III.10.5.

^{vii} Yādā Paśyaḥ Paśyate Rukmavarṇam Kartāramīśam Puruṣam Brahmāyonim, Tadā Vidvānpuṇyapāpe Vidhūya Nirānjanāḥ Paramam Sāmyamupaiti || Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad III.1.3.

^{viii} Yato Va Imāni Bhūtānī Jāyante Yena Jātāni Jīvanti Yatprayantyaabhisamvisanti. || Taittirīya Upaniṣad III.1.1.

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^{ix} S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 194, p.670