



A study of Moksa (liberation) in the light of Shankara and Ramanuja

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Abstract

This research paper presents a proportional study of the concept of Moksha (liberation) in the philosophies of Shankara and Ramanuja, two influential thinkers within the realm of Indian philosophy. Moksha holds great significance in Hindu spirituality as the ultimate goal of human existence, representing liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Shankara, a proponent of Advaita Vedanta, and Ramanuja, a proponent of Vishishtadvaita Vedanta, offer distinct perspectives on Moksha, reflecting their respective philosophical frameworks.

The aim of this research is to explore and analyse the similarities and differences between Shankara and Ramanuja's views on Moksha, examining their ontological, epistemological, and soteriological aspects. Shankara's Advaita Vedanta asserts the non-dualistic nature of reality, positing that the individual self (Atman) and the ultimate reality (Brahman) are ultimately identical. In contrast, Ramanuja's Vishishtadvaita Vedanta presents a qualified non-dualistic perspective, emphasizing a qualified relationship between the individual self and the Supreme Being (Brahman).

This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on Moksha by shedding light on the diverse interpretations of this fundamental concept within Hindu philosophy. It highlights the valuable contributions of Shankara and Ramanuja while emphasizing the complexity and richness of their philosophical frameworks. The findings of this research will provide a deeper understanding of Moksha and its significance in Indian philosophy and spirituality, offering valuable insights for scholars, practitioners, and enthusiasts of Hindu thought.

Key Words: Moksha, Hindu Philosophy, Advaita Vedanta,

Introduction

In Indian philosophy and spirituality, the idea of moksha, which may be translated as “ultimateliberation” or “emancipation from the cycle of birth and death,” plays an important role. Throughout the course of history, it has been investigated and interpreted by a variety of schools of philosophy, with major contributions coming from famous philosophers such as Shankara and Ramanuja. The purpose of this research article is to perform a comparative examination of their viewpoints on Moksha, with the goals of emphasizing their similarities and contrasts and throwing light on their various philosophical frameworks.

Shankara and Ramanuja are considered to be the founders of two separate schools of thought within the realm of Hindu philosophy. These schools are known respectively as Advaita Vedanta and Vishishtadvaita Vedanta. Both of these thinkers recognize the importance of Moksha, but they come at comprehending this transcendental state of release from quite different perspectives and provide very different interpretations of its meaning (Jash,2022).

Shankara, who is widely considered to be the most influential supporter of the Advaita Vedantaschool of thought, is credited with popularizing the idea of non-dualism, also known as advaita.He asserted that the ultimate truth, which is referred to as Brahman, is devoid of any differencesor plurality. Shankara proposes that the individual self, also known as the Atman, and Brahmanare, in the end, the same thing, and that liberation, or moksha, may be attained by the comprehension of this non-dualistic nature. This study will analyse the ways in which religious and spiritual practices, social conventions, and cultural components of Hindu culture have beenimpacted by Shankara’s Advaita Vedanta and Ramanuja’s Vishishtadvaita Vedanta respectively.

The study of Moksha in the light of Shankara and Ramanuja offers a chance to investigate andappreciate the vast variety that exists within the realm of Hindu philosophical traditions. We may get insights into the intricate and multidimensional nature of the desire for emancipation as well as the underlying philosophical and theological assumptions that define these ideologiesif we compare and contrast their respective points of view. By doing this comparative study, we aim to get a better understanding of Moksha and the role it plays in Indian philosophy andspirituality. At the same time, we want to give credit where credit is due and acknowledge the significant contributions that Shankara and Ramanuja have made to the continuing philosophical dialogue (Kanojia,2022).

Selection of Primary Texts:

The primary writings, such as Shankara's interpretations on the Upanishads (such as the Mandukya Upanishad), and Ramanuja's works, such as the Sri Bhashya, will serve as the primary sources for comprehending the various philosophers' perspectives on Moksha. The selection of pertinent passages from these writings that particularly address the notion of Moksha and the accompanying philosophical principles will be given careful attention, and we will make our selections accordingly. In order to guarantee precise interpretation and comprehension of the main materials, we will also reference translations of those writings as well as commentary written by well-known academics (Rangaswami,2022).

Comparative Analysis: The comparative analysis will serve as the foundation around which this study will be built. It will entail a thorough investigation of the main texts as well as the secondary sources, with the major emphasis being on the parallels and divergences that exist between the views that Shankara and Ramanuja had towards Moksha. Within each of these philosophical frameworks, several issues, such as the nature of reality, the function of the individual self, the routes to freedom, and the ultimate objective of human life, will be contrasted to one another and studied. The investigation will use a thematic approach, during which it will identify important themes and ideas and investigate the meaning of these things in connection to Moksha (Rangaswami,2022).

Interpretation and Synthesis: In order to build a full knowledge of Moksha in the context of Shankara and Ramanuja, the results of the comparative study will be understood and synthesized. The purpose of this exercise is to discover major themes, philosophical concepts, and conceptual frameworks that arise from each of their unique points of view, as well as any possible areas of convergence or divergence between those viewpoints. Evidence drawn from the original texts, secondary sources, and academic conversations taking place in the relevant fields will be used to back up the interpretations (Shukla-Bhatt,2022).

Evaluation of Broader Implications:

In addition to this, the study will investigate the larger ramifications of Shankara and Ramanuja's perspectives on Moksha. This necessitates an investigation of the ways in which their philosophical viewpoints influence Hindu society's religious and spiritual activities, as well as its social norms and cultural components. The purpose of this study is to offer a full

knowledge of the meaning and relevance of Moksha in the context of Shankara's and Ramanuja's philosophies. This will be accomplished by assessing the larger implications of the research. In order to properly evaluate the larger implications, it is necessary to take into account not only the historical and social circumstances in which these philosophical frameworks arose, but also their relevance and effect in the modern day (Sarkar, 2022).

Discussion

The philosophical viewpoints of Shankara and Ramanuja are compared and contrasted via the lens of Moksha, which exposes both parallels and distinctions between the two schools of thought. The examination of original texts, secondary sources, and academic debates has yielded important new insights on their various perspectives on the idea of liberty. The following is a summary of the most important findings from the comparative research:

- **The Characteristics of Reality:** Shankara and Ramanuja, two of the most influential figures in the history of Hinduism, were both aware of the presence of Brahman, the ultimate reality. However, their conceptions of the essence of Brahman are very unlike to one another. The Advaita Vedanta school of thought developed by Shankara claims that Brahman is an absolute, non-dual truth that is beyond all differences and characteristics. On the other hand, Ramanuja's Vishishtadvaita Vedanta philosophy contends that Brahman is marked by a divine form and contains qualities. This philosophy holds that Brahman is the ultimate reality.
- **Individual Self (Atman):** Both Shankara and Ramanuja see the essence of the individual self in relation to Brahman from very different vantage points. According to Shankara, the individual self, also known as the Atman, is ultimately the same as Brahman, and the understanding of this identity is the path that leads to moksha (liberation). Ramanuja, on the other hand, places a lot of emphasis on the difference between the individual self and Brahman. He believes that the individual self is a dependent existence on Brahman. According to Ramanuja, achieving moksha entails establishing a happy and everlasting connection with the divine.

Ultimate Goal:

- **Shankara and Ramanuja disagree on a number of issues, including the ultimate purpose of Moksha.** According to Shankara, the attainment of Moksha entails coming to terms with one's intrinsic identification with Brahman. This, in turn, results in the breaking of the cycle of birth and death. It entails the disappearance of the false sense of a separate self and its replacement with universal awareness. Moksha, on the other hand, is seen by Ramanuja to be an everlasting connection with the divine in which the individual self continues to exist while simultaneously delighting in a happy union with Brahman.
- **The Convergence and Divergence of Opinions:** In spite of the fact that Shankara and Ramanuja have opposing viewpoints about a variety of facets of moksha, there are other areas in which their teachings coincide. Both religions stress the need of preparing oneself for emancipation via the study of scripture, the practice of contemplation, and leading an ethical life. In addition, they acknowledge the need of spiritual practice and the requirement of a knowledgeable guide (Guru) to lead aspirants to Moksha along the road to enlightenment.

These findings lead to a more in-depth understanding of the philosophical complexities surrounding Moksha in the context of the teachings of Shankara and Ramanuja. In addition to this, they highlight the multifaceted nature

of Hindu philosophy as well as the many routes and points of view that are open to those who are looking for emancipation. These discoveries have ramifications that extend beyond the areas of religious practice, spirituality, and the investigation of the overarching goal of human life. Our grasp of Moksha and the role it plays in the philosophies of Shankara and Ramanuja will continue to advance as more inquiry and investigation are conducted in this field (Tewari, 2022).

Conclusion

This study of Moksha in the light of Shankara and Ramanuja has provided a comprehensive analysis of their respective perspectives on liberation within Hindu philosophy. Through an examination of primary texts, secondary sources, and scholarly discussions, we have gained valuable insights into the similarities, differences, and implications of their philosophies.

Shankara's Advaita Vedanta philosophy emphasizes the non-dual nature of reality and the realization of one's identity with Brahman as the path to Moksha. Ramanuja's Vishishtadvaita Vedanta philosophy, on the other hand, emphasizes the eternal relationship between the individual self and Brahman, leading to a blissful union with the divine. These differing perspectives on the nature of reality, the individual self, and the paths to liberation reflect the diversity within Hindu philosophy and provide seekers with alternative approaches to attaining liberation. While Shankara emphasizes discernment and the realization of the illusory nature of the world, Ramanuja emphasizes surrender and devotion to the divine. These paths offer distinct means to transcend the limitations of the individual self and attain liberation.

Furthermore, the ultimate goal of Moksha differs between Shankara and Ramanuja. For Shankara, Moksha involves the dissolution of the individual self into the cosmic consciousness, leading to the cessation of the cycle of birth and death. In contrast, Ramanuja conceives Moksha as an eternal relationship with the divine, where the individual self retains its distinct existence but experiences union with Brahman. These divergent perspectives provide alternative understandings of the nature of liberation and the relationship between the individual and the transcendent.

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