



## The concept of *Mokṣa*: A comparative study between Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Advaita Vedānta

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyse a comparative study between the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system and the Advaita Vedānta, regarding the nature and means of liberation. According to the Nyāya -Vaiśeṣika, liberation is the state of absolute cessation of all kind of suffering; whereas the Advaita Vedāntins hold that liberation is the state of infinite bliss. Regarding the means of liberation there are also different views among the Nyāya -Vaiśeṣika system and Advaita Vedānta. The Naiyāyikas and the Advaitins both are admitted that *tattvajñāna* leads to the liberation; but Mahārṣi Kaṇāda also gives importance to *yoga* and some later Vaiśeṣikas support *jñānakarmasamuccayavāda*. On the other hand, although the Advaita Vedāntins give importance on the *niṣkāma karma* for purification of mind but it is not the direct cause of liberation, *tattvajñāna* only leads to the state of infinite bliss i.e. *mokṣa*.

**Keywords:** *Puruṣārtha, Mokṣa, Brahman, Avidyā, Tattvajñāna, Jñānakarmasamuccaya*

### Introduction

'*Mokṣa*' (liberation) is one of the most important concept in classical Indian Philosophy. In Indian philosophy '*mokṣa*' regarded as the supreme end or *parama puruṣārtha*. Most of the Indian thinkers accepted four kinds of *puruṣārthas* i.e. *dharma, artha, kāma, mokṣa*. Among these four *puruṣārthas*, '*mokṣa*' regarded as the supreme end or *parama puruṣārtha* because of its eternality. Excepting to the materialist Cārvāka, all the Indian philosophers accept that liberation (*mokṣa*) is the supreme end of human life (*parama puruṣārtha*). But, there are different views among the philosophical schools about the nature of liberation and the means of liberation and it is also variously expressed by them as '*svarga*', '*apavarga*', '*mukti*', '*vimukti*', '*nirvāna*', '*kaivalya*', '*niḥśreyasa*' and '*mokṣa*'. According to the heterodox schools like Buddhist, Jaina and as well as the orthodox schools like Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya, Yoga and Mīmāṃsā, liberation is the state of absolute cessation of all kind of suffering; whereas all the Vedāntins 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 action or both action and knowledge are the direct cause of liberation. In this paper, I intend to analyse a comparative study between the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and the Advaita Vedānta system regarding the concept of liberation.

### *Mokṣa* in nyāya-vaiśeṣika philosophy

According to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosopher, liberation is the state of absolute cessation of all kinds of suffering. To denote this ultimate goal Mahārṣi Kaṇāda, the founder of Vaiśeṣika school, used the term '*niḥśreyasa*' in his *Vaiśeṣikasūtra*- "...*Padārthānām sādharmaivaidharmyaḥ tattvajñāna niḥśreyasam*"<sup>[1]</sup>.

But, significantly when he has defined this ultimate goal as liberation of self from conjunction with all its attributes and there being no scope for further bondage, he has used the term '*mokṣa*'- "*Tadabhāve saṃyogābhāvo prādurbhāvaśca mokṣa*"<sup>[2]</sup>. Whereas, Paśastapādācārya, the commentator of *Vaiśeṣikasūtra*, has used a novel term '*mahodaya*' in his *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha*- "*praṇāmya hetumiśvaram .....pravakṣyate mahodayaḥ*"<sup>[3]</sup>, which means the great gain i.e. the source or knowledge which is the aim of human life. In keeping with the view of Kaṇāda, Paśastapādācārya also says that supreme good or *niḥśreyasa* is obtained from the accurate knowledge (*tattvajñāna*) of the similar characteristics (*sādharma*) and dissimilar characteristics (*vaidharma*) of the six categories: *dravya, guṇa, karma, sāmānya, viśeṣa* and *samavāya*. The true nature of a thing is called *tattva*. The knowledge of the true nature of similar as well as dissimilar characteristics of the six categories leads to the supreme good<sup>[4]</sup>.

According to the Vaiśeṣikas, *mokṣa* is absolute negation of pain. In this state the self exists in its essential nature indicated by destruction of all its specific qualities; although these specific qualities are destroyed there is no destruction of the self. The self becomes free from the bondage of body and sense organs etc. due to the cessation of merit and demerit (*dharma-adharma*). And because of the absence of *adṛṣṭa* (the locus of *dharma-adharma*), there is no possibility of new conjunction of the self with the body. The Vaiśeṣika does not accept that there is any kind of eternal bliss in the state of liberation. Because, in the state of liberation the self becomes free from all the attributes including knowledge, pleasure, pain, desire, aversion, volition etc. Therefore, the state of liberation is a state of unconsciousness or absolute cessation of all experience in the self.

Like the Vaiśeṣika philosophers the Naiyāyikas also admit that liberation is the state of absolute cessation of suffering. But they differ on some points. If there is no existence of pleasure as well as knowledge to the liberated self then how

can this liberated state be explained? The opponents of Vaiśeṣikas and its sister school Nyāya, have argued that this kind of liberated self can be compared with a stone. Because, if all the attributes including knowledge, also demolished during the state of liberation then how could be the knowledge of the true nature of objects in the world is directed towards attainment of an ultimate goal. For this reason the Naiyāyikas are more consistent than the Vaiśeṣikas in the rejection of the transcendental happiness in the self as distinguished from empirical pleasure.

According to the Naiyāyikas absolute cessation of suffering is regarded as the state of liberation. It means the highest state is not freedom from knowledge or experience only, but total and absolute freedom from suffering. In this connection, Maḥarṣi Goutama says in his *Nyāyasūtra*—“*tadatyantavimokṣa apavargah*”<sup>[5]</sup> i.e. liberation is the complete annihilation of all suffering, the cessation of the stream of births and deaths also. Maḥarṣi Vātsyāyana, the commentator of *Nyāyasūtra* here points out a close similarity to the state of liberation with *Brahman*; because *Brahman* is characterized by the scripture as fearless and Maḥarṣi also defines the state of liberation as the state of fearlessness, without decay and death<sup>[6]</sup>. But they do not accept the eternal bliss of self in the state of liberation. So, for this reason, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika view of liberation is regarded as *abhāvamokṣavāda*.

Regarding the means of liberation, the Naiyāyikas hold that the knowledge of the self, which is regarded as the *tattvajñāna* in their system ultimately leads to liberation. Though they also give importance to the performance of duties but liberation cannot be achieved by the performance of duties. Duties can lead to heaven which is non-eternal. The practice of *yoga*, austerities, the performance of duties and abstention from sin are subsidiary to the acquisition of true knowledge. Release can be achieved by true knowledge or intuition of the self<sup>[7]</sup>.

On the other hand, both Maḥarṣi Kaṇāda and Praśastapādācārya stated that the essential knowledge of reality through the similarities (*sādharmya*) and dissimilarities (*vaidharmya*) among the categories is the valid means to attain the ultimate end. Though Praśastapādācārya also added that such type of essential knowledge is possible only when it is accompanied with a special sort of merit (*dharma*) that is ordained by the will of god—“*Tacceśvaracodanābhivayaktād dharmādeva*”<sup>[8]</sup>. Maḥarṣi Kaṇāda also gives importance on *yoga* i.e. the quietened state of mind, which is also regarded as the means of the ultimate goal. In this connection, he says that “*tadanārambha ātmasthe manasi śarīrasya duḥkḥābhāvaḥ sa yogaḥ*”<sup>[9]</sup> i.e. by its very nature the mind is always focus on the external objects and usually it helps the individual self in seeking worldly pleasure of life which is always mixed with pain. When this mind is trained to be deactivated and is concentrated on the self itself, then such a mental state has been defined as *yoga*. In this regard Maḥarṣi Kaṇāda also says that, “*Āmakarmasu mokṣo vyākhyātaḥ*”<sup>[10]</sup> here the term *āmakarmasu* means that, through *śrāvana*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* the self-realization is possible. According to Maḥarṣi Kaṇāda knowledge cannot alone lead to the liberation, but to the combination of knowledge with action (*jñānakarmasamuccaya*) is the cause of liberation. Later Vaiśeṣika, Udayana states in his *Kiraṇāvalī* that only right knowledge can remove the incorrect knowledge, which is

the root cause of bondage. But Śrīdhara differs from Udayana on this point. Śrīdhara states that, the mind is cleansed with the constant performance of action, so that the true nature of self is realized through knowledge. So, liberation is achieved by the practice of action as well as knowledge of the true nature of self. Therefore, according to some later Vaiśeṣika liberation is attained through a combination of knowledge and action (*jñāna-karmasamuccaya*).

### **Mokṣa in advaita vedānta**

All the branches of Vedānta philosophy admit that liberation is the state of infinite bliss. In Advaita Vedānta the absolute oneness with *Brahman* is the ultimate end; the individual self is identical with *Brahman* but due to the ignorance (*avidyā*) the self does not realize its true nature and when this ignorance is removed by 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. In this regard, Dharmarajādhvarīndra says in his *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*—“*prāptasya api ānandasya prāptiḥ pariḥtasyāpi anarthasya nivṛtirmokṣaḥ prayojanam*”<sup>[11]</sup>. 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 or *Paramātmā*. By the true knowledge of the self this ignorance is removed. In this context, Dharmarajādhvarīndra also says in his *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*—“*Ānandātmaka Brahmaprāptiśca mokṣaḥ śokanivṛttiśca*”<sup>[12]</sup> i.e. ‘*mokṣa*’ means ‘attainment of *Brahman*, which is bliss’ and as also ‘the cessation of suffering’. In this verse Dharmarajā also clarify that the state of *mokṣa* is a positive state and not negative. Because, as Śruti says, “*Brahma veda Brahmaiva Bhavati*” i.e. he who knows that *Brahman* becomes *Brahman* itself”<sup>[13]</sup>.

According to the Advaitins, 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. Sāstras 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, misdone 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. 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 *śrāvana*, *manana*, *nididhyāsana* the false ideas (*viparīta bhāvanā* and *asambhāvanā*) about the *Brahman* is removed. After that, the man who acquired the four the four necessary pre-requisites (*sādhana-catuṣṭaya*) 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 (*ihāmutraphalabhogavirāga*), (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.

### Comparative analysis between nyāya-vaiśeṣika and advaita vedānta

In this context, some arguments have been raised by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika against the Advaitins. The Naiyāyika may ask: what is the cause of the manifestation of eternal bliss in the self in the state of liberation? In the state of liberation there would not remain any kind of attachment of bliss, because absolute detachment is the pre-condition of liberation.

In response to the above objection the Advaitins says that *mokṣa* is identical with *Brahman* and the individual self who realised 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. So, in Advaita philosophy *mokṣa* is not a new attainment or *aprāptasya prāpti*, rather it is the realization of one’s own nature i.e. *prāptasya prāpti*. Here Dharmarāja also mention the *Śruti pramāṇa*—“*tarati śokaṃ ātmavidī*”<sup>[14]</sup>. This means the state of *mokṣa* is purely positive; there has no sorrow, no negativity.

On the contrary, the Advaitins says that the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika view of liberation is not acceptable. Because the notion of the self which discussed by them is defective. According to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, in the state of liberation the self becomes devoid of bliss as well as consciousness and it is reduced to a material object like a stone-slab. But ‘cessation of suffering’ is *abhāva padārtha*, so it should be clear that which kind of ‘*abhāva*’ is it? If it is regarded as *dhvamsābhāva* then it cannot be regarded as the highest goal. Because, there is a possibility to arise this pain again due to the nature of *dhvamsābhāva*. When one pain is demolish then another will be generate. If this ‘cessation of sufferings’ regarded as *prāgabhāva* then after the destruction of the *prāgabhāva* of *duḥkha*, again the *duḥkha* is generate like the *prāgabhāva* of a pot. This is not regarded as a state of *mokṣa*. Or if it would be say that all the *prāgabhāva* of *duḥkha* is destroyed then it should be accepted that all pains are generated and this kind of *mokṣa* does not desirable to anybody. Lastly, if this *duḥkhābhāva* regarded as *atyantābhāva* then, this kind of *abhāva* is eternal so liberation is always be present and then the question of bondage and liberation is meaningless. Besides, if it is admitted that in the state of liberation the absence of pain and as well as happiness is occurred then nobody can desire for this kind of state. So, according to the Advaitins liberation does not regard as the state of ‘cessation of suffering’.

### Conclusion

It can be said that there are differences of opinion between the Advaitins and the Nyāya -Vaiśeṣika regarding the nature of liberation. On the other hand, both the Naiyāyikas and the Advaitins are accepted *tattvajñāna* as the means of liberation, but some Vaiśeṣika philosophers support *jñānakarmasamuccaya*. According to the Advaitins, *jñāna-karma samuccaya* is not possible, because knowledge and action is opposite like light and darkness. The ‘*tattvajñāna*’

only leads to the ultimate end. Although the importance of *niṣkāma karma* accepted by the Advaitins for purification of mind, but *kāmyakarma* 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, only *tattvajñāna* or *aparokṣabrahmātmaikyajñāna* leads to the state of infinite bliss i.e. *mokṣa*.

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