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Moksha or Liberation: From an Ethical and Practical Point of View

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Abstract

In Indian culture and heritage moksha is concerned with individual's spiritual and moral life. Indian philosophy explains sorrows and sufferings in life to find a way by which the sorrows and sufferings can be completely overcome. Indian philosophers have applied the realistic and practical approach to solve the problems of life and reality. All the Indian schools of Philosophy, (except the Carvakas and the Bauddha) accept the self or atman as eternal, pure and free. Due to ignorance, the self identifies itself with body and undergoes various sufferings. They hold that individual human being can attain moksha or liberation. The theories and procedures applied to describe the notion of liberation prove that the Indian thinkers originated a comprehensive way of life and also prescribed a systematic approach for attaining moksha or liberation. In this short discourse I want to focus some analysis of philosophical explanation of the concept of moksha from an ethical and practical point of view.

We can see that all the schools of Indian philosophy have a positive approach towards human life. They have a general agreement to discuss the problems of life and reality and they have also agreed that there are sorrows and sufferings in human life. That is why they put much emphasis to develop a structure or to construct a procedure by which human being can completely overcome from sorrows and sufferings. According to them the sorrows and sufferings of man are due to ignorance or *avidya* about self. Ignorance is the main cause of all sorrows and sufferings. It is accepted by all the schools that man can conquer ignorance and attain total freedom. Total freedom is explained in Indian philosophy as *moksha* or liberation. *Moksha* is one of the four goals or aims or basic ends of human life. The four goals or aims or basic ends of human life which is known as *purushartha* in Indian philosophy are as follows: *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. In the field of Indian culture and heritage *dharma* is explained and placed first, because it is considered superior to *artha* and *kama*. *Dharma*, *artha* and *kama* are too much linked with man's social life but *moksha* is concerned with individuals spiritual or moral life. With reference to the *Bhagbad-gita* it can be said that those who have desires for *artha* and *kama* may follow the *karmakanda* of *Bhagbad-gita* to obtain their desired object, whereas those who are totally free from such desires and aim at *dharma* and *moksha*, he may follow the *jnanakanda* of *Bhagbad-gita*. In

this short discourse I want to focus some philosophical and also ethical analysis of the concept of *moksha* or liberation as described in Indian philosophy.

It is true that the different schools of Indian philosophy have explained liberation from a different point of view. But it is also true that every schools of Indian Philosophy (except the *Carvakas*) is moved to discuss a philosophical, spiritual and intellectual sight of liberation. When the schools of Indian philosophy explain sorrows and sufferings in life they wanted to find a way by which the sorrows and sufferings can be completely overcome. Indian philosophers have applied the realistic and practical approach to solve the problems of life and reality. All the Indian schools of Philosophy, (except the *Carvakas* and the *Bauddha*) accept the self or *Atman* as eternal, pure and free. Due to ignorance, the self identifies itself with body and undergoes various sufferings. They hold that individual human being can attain *moksha* or liberation. In order to attain *moksha* he/she has to know the real nature of the self or *Atman*. According to the orthodox schools of philosophy Liberation cannot be achieved without the right knowledge of reality. They hold that the best way to know the reality is to know the self or *atman*. They admit '*atman*' as reality, which is a permanent spiritual substance. So to know the self or *atman* is to know the reality. It is also right that Liberation is not due to knowledge alone, besides knowledge *karma*, *bhakti*, and *Yoga* are other important means of attaining liberation. The prudential *karma* (duties) should be discarded. But the compulsory daily and occasional duties must be performed. I think, As Knowledge of self or *atman* is necessary for attaining liberation or *moksha*, performance of some duties is also necessary for it. Though the Indian philosophers differ among themselves regarding the way or the path of attaining liberation, but they (except the *Carvakas*) have accepted liberation as the 'Summum bonum' or as the highest end (*parama-purusartha*) of life.

Some of the analogous but are not completely identical terms used to denote *moksha* are *mukti*, *nirvana*, *turiya*, *kaivalya*, *apavarga*, *nihsreyasa* etc. but the question is how did we come to have the concept of *moksha*? The common people will answer -the fear of death might have given rise to the concept of *moksha*.. It is also true that from the very beginning of history the humans tried either to avoid the fear of death or to overcome it. The term '*moksha*' is derived from the root *muc* (*much* or *muk*), which means freeness. According to the orthodox school *moksha* is stands for the spiritual principle, Bliss and state of perfection. It is defined in Indian Philosophy as the state of being liberated as well as the process of becoming free from any type of bondages. In Indian tradition, it is also known as *as mukti* (emancipation).¹ In the broader aspect *moksha* means freedom from all types of sorrows and sufferings in life and the cycle of death and rebirth. We can see there is some psychological aspects in the concept of *moksha*, when it stands for self-realization.

The concept of *Moksha* or liberation is closely connected with the questions like what is the nature of suffering? What is its route source? etc. The Indian thinkers have dealt a lot to answer those questions. We can see in Indian philosophy the different schools have tried to solve the question of sorrows and sufferings in their own ways. All the schools of Indian philosophy admit the existence of sufferings in the world and they have declared that

ignorance about the reality is the main cause of sorrows and sufferings. And it is also true that, from a Philosopher to a layman the quest to get a way to escape from suffering is common. Now we will go through some short descriptions which have been given by the different schools of Indian philosophy.

According to the *Nyaya-Vaisesika* School of philosophy ignorance is the cause of all pain and sufferings. To attain liberation an individual must acquire a true knowledge of the self or *Atman (tattva-jnana)*.² To realize the original status of the self or *Atman* he/she has to listen (*sravana*) the spiritual instructions about the self, he/she has to firmly establish the knowledge of the self by means of reasoning (*manana*) and after that he/she must meditate on the self in conformity with the principles of *yoga (nididhyasana)*. By these type of feelings, the wrong or false knowledge (*mithya-jnana*) is destroyed. Destruction of wrong or false knowledge leads to destruction of passions and impulses (*dosa*). Destruction of passion leads to destruction of actions (*pravritti*). Destruction of action leads to destruction of rebirth. The cessation of rebirth means the end of his connection with the body and consequently, of all pain and sufferings and that is liberation. In the state of liberation, there is neither pleasure nor pain.

Samkhya school of philosophy describes *moksha* as *kaivalya*. The concept of *kaivalya* in *Samkhya* school of philosophy is the realization of aloofness with liberating knowledge of one's self and union with the spiritual universe. The *Samkhya* recognises *purusa* or the Self as eternally liberated. They hold that, to attain liberation from sufferings, the knowledge of distinction between *purusa* and *prakriti*, i.e, *vivekajnana* is required.³ In the state of liberation, there is complete isolation (*Kaivalya*) of the self from *prakriti* and its evolutes, the mind body complex.⁴ Liberation can be both embodied (*jivanmukti*) and disembodied isolation (*videhamukti*) of the self.

We can see In *Yoga* Philosophy "*Yoga*" is a theory and practice both. Now *Yoga* has gained a world-wise vivid and wide acceptance. The *Yoga* also considers complete isolation of the self from the mind (*buddhi*) and its modes and dispositions as liberation. In the state of liberation the self abides in its essential nature and realizes its intrinsic nature. In *Yoga* Philosophy the eight limbs of *yoga (astanga-yogsadana)* treated as a way to *moksha or liberation* The *Yoga* Philosophers hold that *avidyā* - or ignorance is cause of *bandhan* or sufferings. Then the question is how to remove the *avidyā* or ignorance or incorrect knowledge. According to the *Yoga* Philosophy it seeks to end ordinary reflexive awareness (*cittavrtti nirodh*) with deeper, purer and holistic awareness (*asamprājñāta samādhi*).⁵ The basic and primary condition to attain *Moksha or liberation* *Yoga*, encourages practice (*abhyāsa*) with detachment (*vairāgya*), which over time leads to deep concentration (*samādhi*). Detachment means withdrawal from outer world and calming of mind, while practice means the application of effort over time. Such steps are claimed by *Yoga* school as leading to *samādhi*, a state of deep awareness, release and bliss called *moksha*.

The *Mimamsaka* School of philosophy considered the performance of Vedic rites and sacrifices as means to the attainment of heaven (*svarga*). They regarded Heaven as the highest end of life or liberation.⁶

The *Advaita Vedantins* hold that, the self identifies itself with body-mind complex due to ignorance which is known as *maya*. This type of identification with body-mind is called bondage, and it is removed by right knowledge of Brahman (*Brahman Jnana*).⁷ According to *Sankara* Liberation is the realisation of the identity of the soul with the *Brahman*. *Sankara* believes that liberation is not merely the absence of pain, but its a positive bliss. Liberation can be both attainable, *jivanmukti* and *videhamukti* of the self. In the state liberation individual self (*jiva*) is eternally liberated and identical with the absolute Brahman. The *vishistadvaitavadin Ramanuja* holds that the state of liberation means the unimpeded manifestation of the natural qualities of intelligence and bliss. Liberation consists in the dissolution of egoism and manifestation in full glory of the soul. The disembodied release (*videhamukti*) is the only kind of release admitted by him.

We can see that in Buddhism *moksha* is the key concept. In Buddhism the concept of *Moksha* described and explained as Nirvana which is stands for a realization that there is no self nor consciousness. *Moksha or Nirvana* is a place of perfect peace and happiness. *Nirvana* explained as the highest state of perfection, that can be attained by someone. It's a state of enlightenment. In *Bauddha* school of philosophy the concept of *Moksha* is too much associated with birth-rebirth cycle.⁸ They hold that human life is the repeated cycle of rebirth. This is called bondage. The Buddhists also hold that life is full of suffering and Suffering is due to the ignorance of four noble truths. Buddha has told about eight paths or '*astangik-marga*', following this path one can put a stop to suffering. This total extinction of suffering is known as *Moksha* or Nirvana or liberation.⁹

The *jaina* school of philosophy explained *moksha* as release from the cycle of births and deaths. Jainism holds that Liberation is consists in the complete dissociation of the soul from matter. Attaining *Moksha* requires annihilation of all good and bad activities.¹⁰ According to *Jainism* a liberated individual becomes a *siddha purusa*. *siddha purusa* is one who has accomplished his ultimate objective.

The *Carvaka* do not believe *Moksha* or liberation as highest goal or 'Summum bonum' or *parama-purusartha*. They regard *kama* or the enjoyment or the sensual pleasure as the highest end of life. To acquire sensual pleasure they can do everything. *Carvaka*'s message regarding liberation is- avoid pain and gain pleasure. The motto of the *Carvaka* is "live for pleasure, after death there is nothing to enjoy, so enjoy yourself until your death". The materialistic view is fully focused when the *Carvaka* prescribes a specific way of life. They believe in the practice by which one can overcome all the pains and miseries and attain only pleasure.

The above mentioned views of different schools of Indian philosophy about liberation is spiritual and practical. The orthodox schools of philosophy and the heterodox *Bouddha* and *Jaina* also described *moksha* from a spiritual point of view. To explain the notion of

liberation the Indian philosophers have applied the realistic approach to solve the problems of life and reality. The *Carvaka* School of philosophy explained *moksha* from practical point of view. I think the Philosophical theories about liberation is not only spiritual but also ethical. There is no doubt that karma has a great role through our lives, and even to end karma for all. Jainism particularly treat bad and good karma alike as evils. They have tried to liberate oneself removal of all types of karmas, but to fulfill that purpose also we have to perform karma. So *karma* has a great role in achieving liberation. The theories and procedures applied to describe the notion of liberation prove that the Indian thinkers originated a comprehensive way of life and also prescribed a systematic approach for attaining the goal of life. It is undoubtedly true that human being is not only a physical being, but is a thinking being, too. And Most of the time, human being suffer within their own mental worlds, but this suffering can be overcome. Buddha has told about eight paths or '*astangik-marga*', following this path one can put a stop to suffering. Attaining *Moksha* requires annihilation of all good and bad activities. According to Jainism a liberated individual becomes a *siddha purusa*. *siddha purusa* is one who has accomplished his ultimate objective. According to Yoga Philosophy the eight limbs of yoga (*astanga-yogsadana*) treated as a way to *Moksha or* liberation. *Sankara* believes that liberation is not merely the absence of pain, but its a positive bliss. The concept of *Kaivalya* in *Samkhya* school of philosophy is the realization of aloofness with liberating knowledge of one's self and union with the spiritual universe. To attain liberation an individual must acquire a true knowledge of the self or Atman (*tattva-jnana*).

All the above mentioned schools of Indian philosophy share a comprehensive point of view to develop an ethical and practical sense of the concept of liberation. All the schools of Indian philosophy contain an ethical aspect which is practically known as *sadhana*. The spiritual theories regarding liberation can be applied in a practical way by their adherents to solve the problems of life and reality, and to attain the highest goal of life. All the schools of Indian philosophy applied a method of practice through which one can overcome sorrows and sufferings and attain *moksha* or liberation. It can be noted that even the materialist *Carvaka* also prescribed a specific way of life. Each Indian philosophy prescribed a lifestyle through which one can explore one's inner experience to liberate or emancipate himself and considers the liberation or emancipation as the highest goal of life. It's a state of selfless love, service to others purification, and self-control. It is also true that the Indian Philosophical theories regarding liberation have tried to develop some techniques to solve the problems of human life, and to solve the problems it has provided practices. This practical approach which is based on its own philosophy towards life and reality makes the Indian philosophical theories ethical.

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