The concept of Liberation as treated in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

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**Abstract**

The concept of *Mokṣa* or liberation occupies the paramount position in the different branches of Indian philosophy as well as literature. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* mentions the concept of liberation is nothing but the realization of the real nature of the self and also the elimination of the false nature. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* has mentioned all the paths for attaining liberation viz., the path of *jñānayoga*, *karmayoga*, *bhakti yoga* etc. It also mentions he practices of the eightfold-yoga to attain liberation. Liberation is the eternal and indestructible status, free from all troubles including from birth and death cycle. It is the transcendental perfection of individual self which is not affected by any evil attributes. *Mokṣa* is abiding in Brahman and that’s why it is the supreme perfection.

**Keywords**: concept, *Mokṣa*, *jñānayoga*, *karmayoga*, *bhakti yoga*

1. **Introduction**

The concept of liberation occupies the important position in the different branches of Indian philosophy as well as literature. The Vedic and Puranic literatures together with different systems of philosophy has emphasized upon the concept of *Mokṣa* as it is the highest *purusārthā* among the four. The thinkers of ancient India devoted their intellectual resources to discover the path leading to *Mokṣa*, the ultimate goal of human life.

2. **Concept of liberation in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa***

In *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, concept of liberation is nothing but the realization of the real nature of the self and also the elimination of the false nature. It considers human birth as an excellent opportunity presented by the Supreme Being to an individual for breaking down the shackles of māyā. People who waste their lives by attachment to the worldly objects are ignorant of the real advantage of human life. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* mentions mind as the alone cause of bondage and liberation of the soul. When attached to the worldly objects, it causes bondage and when attached to the Supreme Being, it brings liberation to the self.¹  

Liberation is caused by *vidyā* and the bondage of *jīva* is caused due to *Avidyā*. liberation consists in the destruction of this ignorance. Ignorance can be destroyed only by right knowledge. With the destruction of ignorance the true nature of the self is revealed. The realisation of the jīva’s true nature is called as liberation.² The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* also describes the concept of liberation as the realization of the real nature of the self and discarding the unreal form. *Vidyā* helps in the realization of true nature of the self. According to this *Puraṇa*, liberation is the realisation of the true nature of the self by discarding the false nature that hides the real one.³

3. **Means of liberation**

This *Puraṇa* prescribes the different paths for attaining liberation such as knowledge, action, yoga and devotion. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* also has mentioned all the paths for attaining liberation Notable among them are the path of *jñānayoga*, *karmayoga*, *bhakti yoga* . It also assigns the path of *yoga* also⁴.

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To overcome the hindrance, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa suggests the following eightfold yogic methods, namely, yama, niyama, āsana, prānāyāma, dhārana, dhyāna and samādhi. Yama, niyama are the particularly most popularly accepted methods of discipline of body and mind.

4. By the means of Yogic path

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa advocates the path of yoga as one of the ways of attaining liberation. Yogic practice s make the mind prepared for accepting the true knowledge of the self. The spiritual aspirant must restrain one’s mind from all the objects of senses, material goods and meditate upon the Supreme Being in order to attain liberation. Just as the magnet attracts a piece of iron, just like that the Supreme Being attracts to yogi who meditates on him. The term yoga literally means union or to join. It is derived from the root yuj. Actually there are three different meaning of the root yuj (i) yujiryoge meaning to join, (ii) yuy samādhaus i.e., in the sense of concentration , (iii) yuy shiyamane i.e. in the sense of controlling. Hence, the term yoga may mean (i) spiritual unification i.e. the union of the individual self with the supreme self. (ii) concentration of the mind, (iii) complete control of mental modes. In the yoga system of Patanjali, the word yoga is used in the third sense, i.e. the full restraint of the states of citta, i.e. the mind –” yoga citta-vṛttinirodah” 5

The purpose of yoga is to eliminate all kinds of violent, cruel, brutal tendencies and at last it seems to be disappearing altogether. For this purpose, the yoga system prescribes eightfold method consisting of yama (abstention), niyama (observation), āsana (posture), prānāyāma (regulating of breath), pratyāhāra (withdrawal of the senses), dhyāna (meditation), dāranā (contemplation) and samādhi (concentration)6. Of these the first five are called bahirā āṅga or external aids while the last three are the antar āṅga or internal means.

The practices of the eightfold-yoga are also repeatedly mentioned in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. In the twenty eight chapter of the third skanda of the this Purāṇa, the process of the eightfold yoga is found. Here, it is said that by practicing yama and the other disciplined of Yoga, the mind is able to think of the supreme God. In the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, it is clearly mentioned that by the practicing yoga one can become tranquil, pure and righteous and which paves the path to Brahman.7 Again in the nineteenth chapter of the eleventh skanda of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, the twelve divisions of (each) yamas and niyams are found.8 The niyamas are – ahīṃsā (non-fliction of pain), satya (truth), aśeya (non-stealing), asaṅga (non-attachments), hṛi (modesty), asacaya (non-storing), āṣṭikya (faith in religion), brahmacarya (continence), mauna (silence), sthaīrya (steadiness) ksāmā (forgiveness) and ahāya (fearlessness). The niyamas are – śauc (bodily and mental purity), japa (mental repetition of the mantra), tapas (asceticism), homa sacrificial offerings), uradhā (faith), ātithya (hospitality), arcanā (daily worship), tīrthāmana (visiting lpaces of pilgrimages), parārthehā (desire for the supreme object), tuṣṭi (contentment) and ācā ryasevana (service of the spiritual teacher)9

In the ninth chapter of the 7TH skandas of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, there some tools are found through which one can ahead to the path of liberation i.e. mauna (silence), vrata (vowed observance), śrūta (sacred knowledge), tapas (austerity), adhyayana (study), svadharma (observance of rules of own caste), vyākhyā (exposition of scriptures), rahaḥ (living in solitude), japa (recital of mantra) and samā dhi (concentration) lead to liberation.10 Āsana or bodily posture is the third one. Āsana helps to promote concentration of mind. Patanjali simply mentions that the posture must be firm, pleasant and easy.11 There are various postures in which a yogi is directed to sit when he is engaged in meditation, e.g., bhadṛāsana etc.

In this way, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, describes the path of yoga in its own style. Moreover, this Purāṇa accepts the path of knowledge and action are also some means through which one can attain liberation.

5. By the means of Jñāna

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa also gives much stress on the path of knowledge, because ajñāna is the main cause of one’s bondage and sufferings. Ajñāna can be removed only by means of ajñāna or knowledge. Clearing up all doubts by discrimination, people should be fixed his mind in the bliss of self, having abstained from everything else. Jñānam itself is the ultimate truth and helps in attaining liberation through the purification of mind and knowledge.

6. Bhakti as the means of liberation

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa is unique in Indian religious literature; and is primarily a bhakti text, with an emphasis on the practice of bhakti and achieving mokṣa through cultivating a personal relationship with Viṣṇu in the form of Kṛṣṇa. This Purāṇa is considered to be the purest and greatest of all the Purāṇa since it
invokes devotion towards Lord Viṣṇu and his various incarnations, primarily focusing on Kṛṣṇa since he was the complete incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa is essentially a text on gospel of bhakti and it truly reveals the means for becoming free from all material work, together with the processes of pure transcendental knowledge, renunciation and devotion to Lord Viṣṇu. Anyone who seriously tries to understand, hears and chants the verses of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa with devotion to Lord Viṣṇu, becomes completely liberated from material bondage and attains mokṣa or liberation from the cycle of births and deaths.

The tenth book (or canto), which is dedicated to Kṛṣṇa, includes the most comprehensive collection of stories about the life of Kṛṣṇa, showing him in all the stages and conditions of human life. It also includes instruction in the practice of bhakti, an analysis of bhakti, and descriptions of the different types of bhakti.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa is primarily a bhakti text, with an emphasis on achieving Mokṣa through cultivating a devotion to h Viṣṇu in the form of Kṛṣṇa. The philosophy and teachings of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa give emphasis on the concept of Mokṣa as it’s the highest reality. While Bhakti Yoga is the prominent teaching, various passages show a synthesis that also includes Sāmkhya, Yoga, Vedānta, and Advaita Vedānta. The Bhāgavata is among the most important texts on bhakti, presenting a fully developed teaching on bhakti. The Bhakti Yoga in the Bhāgavata teaches that the focus of the mind is transformed by filling the mind with thoughts of Kṛṣṇa.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa mentions the nine kinds of devotion: i) śravaṇa-listening to the attributes, deeds, names etc. of god; ii) kīrtana-recital of the glorious of God; iii) smarana- remembering His form, name etc.; iv) pādasevana-serving His feet; v) arcanam- worshipping Him; vi) wandanam-saluting Him, vii) dāsyam-slavish serving God; viii) sakhyam-considering Him a friend; and IX) atmanibedanam surrendering the self to Him. Bhakti means engagement in the devotional service of the Supreme Lord.

The Upaniṣad also defines bhakti is the offering of devotional service in to the Supreme Reality. To perform devotional service one should be relieved from the sense of materialism, work should be performed simply for the satisfaction of the Lord, without any desire for material benefits, is called bhakti. The Bhāgavata teaches that simply following Vedic injunctions that do not produce devotion towards God, is of temporary benefit and so is considered to be fruitless labour. The most vivid description of the concept of bhakti is found in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

The path of bhakti is regarded as having many branches; for the object of men differ according to their natural attributes. Bhakti in this Purāṇa, mentioned is of two types saguna and nirguna. Saguna bhakti is prompted by three gunas viz., sattva, rajas and tamas. But the highest form of bhakti is nirguna, which is not driven by any kind of guṇa.

One who becomes Supreme soul’s devotee with the intention of doing injury to others under the influence of jealousy, anger, with an outlook of full of indifferences is called a tāmasika type of devotee. He, who with a desire of worldly pleasure or of fame or authorities power, worship the supreme lord in his images and entertains notions of difference, is a devotee of rājasika type. He, who wishes to purge all karmas, or desires to dedicate them to the supreme lord or worships the lord with the simple objective of worship (expecting no return for it) but entertains the idea of difference is called a devotee of the sātvika type. Just as the water of the Gangā continuously flow into sea, similarly by merely listening to his Lord’s qualities the mind incessantly flows to Lord who resides in the hearts of all. This close and intimately devotion to the lord, without any expectation of getting the fruits of his labour, is definitely the characteristics of the nirguna type of bhakti yoga. In this Purāṇa, Kapila instructs his mother about the characteristic feature of nirguna bhakti. He says that the steadfast movement of the mind toward the Lord like the uninterrupted flow of the river Ganges towards the sea, inspired by the mere hearing the qualities of Him, is considered as the characteristic of nirguna bhakti. This devotion to the Lord is disinterested steadfast. It is not motivated by any desire. This Purāṇa reveals that nothing can be greater than the selfless bhakti. A devotee doesn’t desire to attain any of the five kinds of liberation such as Sālokya etc rather then he takes delight only in the service of God, they are nirguna bhaktas. Then liberation comes automatically. The nirguna devotee becomes purified by careful performance of daily religious duties with out any motive, by expecting any fruit, without involving the least injury to beings. Residence in the same region with the Supreme soul is sālokya, equality in wealth, power and glory like him is sārṣṭi, staying near Him is sāmipya, similarity of form like him is sārupya and even union with God is ekatva. These kind of nirguna bhaktas don’t accept anything except his service.
According to Bhāgavata Purāṇa, bhakti is the highest Purusārtha. Again, states bhakti as the safest means to attain all kinds of Purusārtha. This Purāṇa enumerates nine kinds of bhakti viz., sravana, kīrtana, smarana, pādasevana, arcana, bandana, dāsyā, sākhya, ātmānivedanam. Through these nine kinds of bhakti one can stand at the liberated state. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa classifies the devotees into three categories, viz., tāmasa, rājasa and sāttvika. The person who worships God with the feeling of violence, vanity etc. is called a tāmasika type of devotee. Tāmasa devotee worships God only for his fame or prosperity. And one who worships God merely for His devotion is a sāttvika devotee. When the mind of a devotee runs towards God at the very hearing of His attributes and when he has intense and desire less devotion for the Supreme Being, his devotion is called nirguṇa bhakti or unqualified devotion. Such type of devotees spurns salvation and always meditations on the God with affection and thus mukti comes to them unasked for. Bhāgavata Purāṇa enumerates five types of liberation which are known as sālokya, sarsti, sāmipya, sārupya and sāyujya respectively. Sridhara Swami says that Sa-lokya means residing in the same loka with the supreme Lord in all heavenly attributes. Sarsti means achievement of the divine powers equal to the Lord, sāmipya, which is proximity to the supreme; Sāmipya means attaining the same form of as of Iśvara. Sāyujya is the highest form of liberation and means of the attainment of unity with God i.e. attaining Brahmanhood.

8. Conclusion

According to the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Liberation can be attained in this life. It is not essential to leave the body for attaining liberation. The only requisite is that one must realize the true nature of the atman and discard attachment to body or any other worldly object. Just as the expert who knows the science of separating gold from stone, collects gold from goldmine, so the knower of spiritual truth realize Brahman by atma-yoga. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa truly reveals liberation as the means of becoming free from all material work, together with the processes of pure transcendental knowledge, renunciation and devotion to Lord Viṣṇu and anyone who seriously tries to understand, hears and chants the verses of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa with devotion to Lord Viṣṇu, becomes completely liberated from material bondage and attains moksa or liberation from the cycle of births and deaths in the material world.

End notes

1. cetah khalvasya bandhāya muktaye cātmano matam/gaGecu saktaA bandhāya rataA vā puAsi muktaye/ BP., 3/25/15
2. Ibid., 11.1.2-4
3. muktirhitva-'nyatha-ru-pa svarūpeṇa vyavasthitih/ Ibid., 2.10.6
4. BP, 11.20.6.
5. YS, 1.2
6. Ibid., 2.29
7. mao yenaiva vidhinā prasannāḥ yāti satpatham/ Ibid., 3.28. 1 (b)
8. ete yamāḥ saniyamā ubhayordvādaūa śmṛṭāḥ/ Ibid., 11. 19.3
9. ahiṁsā satyamasteyamā bhurṣaocayaṁ / āstikyarābhamacaryaṁ ca maunaṁ sthairyaṁ sthairyaṁ kcamāḥbhayam// Saucaḥ ‘japastapo homaḥ ūrdhthā’ tithyamadaraṇam/vertising parārthēhā tucmirā cāryasevanam// Ibid., 11.9.33-34
10. maunavratāurutapam’ dhyayanavadharmavyākhyāraḥjapasamādhaya āpavargyāḥ/ Ibid., 7. 9. 46
11. sthirasukhamásana AYS, 2.46
12. śravanah kirtanaḥ visṇu smaranaḥ pādasevanam/ arcanaḥ vandanaḥ dāsyah sakhyamātmanivedanam/
   / iti puḥ sārptā visṇu bhaktiuccanavalakaṇā/ kriyate bhagavyaddha tanmanye’ dhītamuttamam// BP,
   7.5.23-24
13. NP, 3.29.7
14. BP, 3.29.8
15. Ibid., 3.29.10
16. NP, 3.29.11-12
17. BP, 3.29.13-14
18. Ibid., 7.5.23
19. Ibid., 3.25.32-34
20. sālokyasārtirsāmīpyaśārūpyaikatvamapyuta/ diyamānah na grhantivinā matsevanahjanā%/ Ibid., 3.29.13
21. sālokyaḥ mayā sahaikasmin loke vāsam, sārtcir samānaiucayāṃ, sāmīpyam nikatavartivam, sārūpyam
   samānarūpatām, ektaḥ sāyujiyam. Sridhara Com. On Ibid., 3.29.13

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