



## Concept of Self in Advaita Vedānta *darśana*: a short introduction

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Abstract

Self is one of the central topics in Indian Philosophy. All the school has discussed this topic seriously. Not only āstika philosophy but also nāstika philosophy has discussed the nature of the self. Advaita Vedānta's main philosophical discussion is the nature of the self. According to them, the self is a pure conscious entity; In addition, everything is actually Brahman. Brahman is the only ultimate reality. The world, the God has no transcendental reality, empirically they have manifested; transcendentally, there is nothing exist except the Brahman. Here I have discussed mainly the Advaita Vedānta concept of self, and as a purvapakha (opponent), some other Indian Philosophical concepts regarding the self also I have discussed. Here in this discussion, it is clear that Advaita Vedānta philosophy is the philosophy their A to Z discussion focusing on the nature of self or Brahman. They have discussed many things but the actual aim is to establish the nature of Brahman.

Key words: Self, Indian philosophy, Advaita Vedānta. Brahman, transcendental reality, empirical reality.

Introduction: Advaita Vedānta darśana is not only famous in Indian philosophy but western philosophy also. Even it is so popular in modern India, some of the important modern followers are Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, etc. Before I start my discussion about the Advaita Vedānta concept of self, I would like to clear the meaning of the word 'Vedānta'. Vedānta literally means, "End of the Vedas." There are four types of Vedas: the Rigveda, the Samaveda, the Yajurveda, and the Atharvaveda. Every Veda has divided into four sub-classes the Samhitas (mantras), Brahmanas (commentaries on rituals, ceremonies, and sacrifices), the Aranyakas, and the Upaniṣad (texts discussing meditation, philosophy, and spiritual knowledge). The last part of the Veda is Upanishads in this sense Upanishads is the Vedānta. However, Upaniṣad is not only treated as Vedānta, the Gitā, and the Brahmasūtra, also called Vedānta. Now the question may arise what is the subject matter of Vedānta? The main subject of Vedānta is the discussion of the real nature of the self or Brahma the relation between Brahma and Jivā. Therefore, those texts that discuss the relation between Brahman and Jiva are called Vedānta. Now the question may arise what is the real nature of the self. According to Advaita Vedānta, the Jivā is identical to Brahman. Those who have achieved Brahman's real nature actually realized their own nature or Self-realization. According to Śāṅkara 'Bhrama' is the only real, world that is unreal (mittha), jiva is identical with Brahama.' The world does not have any transcendental reality, it has only empirical reality, and Brahman has only transcendental reality.

### General concept of self in Indian philosophy

In Indian Philosophy, every school has discussed the nature of self, so before going to a detailed discussion of the Advaita Vedānta concept of self I would like to briefly discuss the others school concept regarding the self. What is the self? This question is very important in Indian philosophy, regarding this subject different schools has answered their point of view. In Indian philosophy the word 'self' has been used in several terms, most of the philosophical schools use it as a ātmā. "The word is usually derived from the root an, which means "to breathe"."<sup>1</sup>

Cārvāka philosophy holds that the conscious body is the self (deha eva ātmā); now the question is what it means the conscious body is the self. According to Cārvāka the combination of four material elements like earth, water, fire, and air composed the body, and consciousness arise from these four materials elements. However, most Indian schools raise the question against the Cārvāka School. The question arises here, if the combination of four elements is treated the self, and consciousness arises from these four elements, then why consciousness would not be present in the dead body? While at death, the body has the same element as a living body. They do have not any answer to this question. They do not only deny the unperceived self but also deny all the metaphysical discussion. They have believed only two puruṣārthas viz, artha kāma. Cārvāka of their all

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/self-indian-philosophy>

the theory has discussed based on epistemology. According to Cārvāka, perception is the only source of valid knowledge. In this sense, they only believe those things, which are perceivable. Cārvāka School does not believe in a ātmā and denies anything like liberation.

According to the Jaina school, the self consists of the soul or jīva, which occupies the body. “The soul is formless but it can occupy a body just as light might occupy a room”. Jīva is said to be coextensive (deha poriman) with the body. They have also held a concept two selves can exist in one body like a two-light can illuminate one room. Jaina school believes the self and liberation. Buddhists deny the existence of a permanent self or ātma, but they hold liberation and rebirth. According to Buddhism, they have believed the non-eternal soul is also called the no soul theory of anātmāveda. According to Bauddha philosophy self is nothing but the combination of five skandhas, rūpa, vedanā, saññā, saṃskāra, and vijñāna. A chariot is nothing but the combination of axel, wheel, roof, etc. in the same way self is the combination of five skandhas and all the things are changeable in every movement. According to Bauddha, darśana nirvāṇa is the ultimate reality of human beings.

According to the Nyāya and the Vaiśeika School, the soul or ātmā is a substance, which is eternal. According to them, consciousness is not the actual nature of the self. Actually, the self is unconscious; at the state of liberation, the self has no pleaser, pain, or consciousness. Consciousness arises when the self or ātmā is connecting with manas or the mind. According to Nyāya philosophy ātmā are two types Jivātmā and paramātmā. Jivātmā is the shelter of non-eternal knowledge. But paramātmā is the shelter of eternal knowledge.

The concepts of the self in the Sāṃkhya and the Yoga schools are similar. In Sāṃkhya philosophy, the self is treated as *puruṣa*, or soul and which is pure consciousness, and its opposite character is *prakṛiti*, which represents matter. The character of the self is conscious but loses its inherent consciousness by mistakenly identifying itself with the body.<sup>2</sup> Sāṃkhyas olds plurality of *puruṣa*, it is totally opposite character of the *prakṛiti* or matter. “The *puruṣa*, in Sākhya and Yoga, is an uncaused, eternal, all-pervading, and changeless reality, which witnesses changes as a transcendent subject distinguished by pure consciousness that can it never”<sup>3</sup> become an object of knowledge.

The concept of the self in Mīmāṃsā philosophy is somehow similar to Nyāya and Vaiśeika pilosophy, but there are some differences. “The most significant difference, however, consists of the fact that while according to the Nyāya-Vaiśeika school knowledge is a quality of the self, according to Mīmāṃsā it is an”<sup>4</sup> activity of the self. According to them, self is different from Indiryas, mind or buddhi it is eternal.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/self-indian-philosophy>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/self-indian-philosophy>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mimamsa>

The concept of self in *Advaita Vedānta* Philosophy

The conception of the self or *ātman* in *Advaita Vedānta* is self-realization. Everything always exists in the Brahman; Brahman is pure consciousness, and pure existence there can be no distinction between the external worlds or internal spirit all is one, uniform, unchanged and unchangeable.<sup>5</sup> The subject-object distinctions are thus purely fictitious; an object has no reality without absolute consciousness. Pure consciousness is the essence of the self. The Self is essentially self-luminous. Self is pure light it is express itself when there is no object. The self exists in the deep sleep and it is inferred through recognition like, “ I sleep happily for a long time.” The nature of the self exists the same forever it is unchangeable. It cannot be a subject of bondage and suffering. It is pure knowledge or bliss. The self is vibhu or all-pervasive. It is not the atomic or the intermediary size. Self realizes all the activities of the body.

According to *Advaita Vedānta*, the *ātman* is one's true self and it is identical with *Brahman*. Differences between the *ātman* and *Brahman* arise due to the *upāhās* or illusion. Different jars of different shapes and sizes may contain jar-space. The space enclosed by these jars may appear distinct, but when one breaks the jars, all space becomes one and the same. It was, one and the same to begin with—the jars only created ultimately artificial and unreal differences. Thus the self of all is identical with each other and with *Brahman*. The main subject of *Vedāntā* is I am the *Brahman* or self is the *Brahman* there is no difference between self and *Brahman*. Due to ignorance, individual self has manifested when realizing our own nature or realize *Brahman* real nature, differentiation between self and *Brahman* would vanish. Naturally, we are the *Brahman*, not the part of *Brahman*.

According to *Advaita Vedānta* *Brahman* has not any types of *veda*;<sup>6</sup> *Advaita Vedānta* has admitted three types of *Satya* like, *Pratibhasik Satya*, *Vyavaharik Satya* & *Paramarthik Satya*. *Pratibhasik* happens when the being on its own designs itself to reveal. That means one is designing itself to others. Like, we have a mistake to rope as a snake. This type of instance is *pratibhasik Satya*. *Vyavaharik Satya* is that which is real in piratical uses but it has empirical reality; but its nature is realize as a *mittha* when we realize the nature of *Brahman*, *Paramarthik Satya* is that which is infallible in three *kal* and this is the *Brahman*. According to *Advaita Vedānta* one is real many is unreal. *Brahman* is real and all things are *Brahman*. All things are one it is the mistake of realization. Pure consciousness is the essence of the self. This is the pure consciousness; self is essentially self-luminous.<sup>7</sup> In the stage of deep sleep the self exists, recognition as ‘I slept happily for a long time’.<sup>8</sup> *Brahman* are two types higher *Brahman* (*Nirguna Brahman*) and lower *Brahman* (*Swaguna Brahman*). Some of the *Vādantis* hold the self as a Witness (*sākṣin*), it is the different from *Jīva* and *atman*.

<sup>5</sup> The Buddhist philosophy of universal flux, s mookerjee,p,193

<sup>6</sup> *Veda* are three types viz., *swagota ved*, *swajatiyo ved* and *vijatiya ved*

<sup>7</sup> The self in Indian Philosophy, K. P. Sinha, p. 69.

<sup>8</sup> *Brahma-sūtra- Śāṅkara-bhāṣya*, 2.3.18

Conclusion: On the basic of above discussion, here I would like to draw a conclusion. Advaita Vādanta concept of self is too wider from the common people. ‘Consciousness is everything’ it is not clearly explain the material would. We do not deny our daily life and our own existencess but if we accept the Advaita Vādanta view then it would be very difficult to explain our practical experiencess. Whatever difficulties may arise to explain our practical experiences, one thing must be admit that Advaita Vādanta concept of self has played very impotent role in Indian philosophy and main concept of Indian philosophy they have caught.

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