



The Concept of Self – Indian Perspectives

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Abstract

In this article, an attempt is made to introduce the various concepts of the 'self', offered by different Indian philosophers and as a context for the background of the various thinkers. It is still uncertain when man became conscious of his self and started inquiring about it. The main factor that made man think of his 'self' is the phenomenon of death. This is because the primitive man saw the body of his fellow beings remaining intact, but the vital and mental activities of the man, which he saw just a few minutes ago, are no more. Now, what is the difference? A moment ago, he was there with all his physical and mental activities, but now, his body lies but no activity. Was there something in the body a few minutes ago? Is it departed or disappeared now, so that he is dead? What was that something? Where was it residing, and where is it now? These questions were raised, and he started thinking about them. This process of thinking paved the way for many interesting and varied theories of the 'self'.

Key words: Self, Jiva, vijñānasantāna, Dravya, puruṣa, aham-vrtti, neti neti, Tat tvam asi and paśu.

Introduction

The Webster Dictionary of the English Language defines the word 'self' as 'a person or thing, concerning his, her or identity; as his very self, religion's self...' "...the individual consciousness, as the seat of subjective thought and action..."¹ the first meaning shows the common usage of the term 'self'. The term is used to refer to individuality or identity, and it is referred to as a thing. The second meaning equates the term 'self' with individual consciousness. This is the substantial view held by philosophers on 'self'.

The common-sense conception of the self or the soul is like the conception of a piece of stone. It presupposes the existence of something in the stone, which endures through change. The 'self' is also conceived as an entity that remains permanent through changing experiences, which constitute its conscious life. A man, during his lifetime, has to undergo many experiences and changes right from his cradle to his grave. He is a different personality in his infant stage, a different person in his toddlerhood

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days and again a different person in the final stage of his life. His experiences, thoughts, and attitudes to things are different from what they were in his younger days and in his early manhood. With all these metamorphoses, still he says that he is the same person. He feels that there is an unchanged nucleus within him, which serves as a support of his experiences, his thoughts, his feelings and so on, and he considers this as his soul. Common sense is convinced with this kind of interpretation. Some of the important views of the Indian concepts of the self are discussed here.

Indian Concept of Self

Indian thinkers have made a clear distinction between mind and self and majority of them considered the mind as an instrument of the self. The mental condition and processes are denoted by the term mind are at times *citta*, and the principle that unites their condition and processes is termed as self. According to the Indian schools of thinking' the mind is the mental state and process while the governing principle of these states is called 'self'.

The Materialist views

The word *Cārvāka* is generally used as a synonyms to the materialist, and a reasonable account of the *Carvāka* system is found in *Sarvadarśana Samgraha* and *Saddarsana Samuccaya*. The *Carvākā* accept perception (*Pratyaksa*) as the only *pramāna* to attain valid knowledge. Owing to this epistemological position, they think that there is no spiritual entity called soul (self) since it cannot be perceived. They maintain that the body itself is the soul and in the expression like 'I am lean', 'I am stout' etc., 'I' certainly does not mean anything other than the body. These judgements bespeak that the individual is identical with the body. There is no evidence for the existence of the soul apart from the body.

The *Carvākā* accept the existence of consciousness in the body. They think that consciousness is the emergent quality of the body. It originates from a mysterious combination of the four basic elements. Consciousness can be found in the body as long as the body exists and it ceases to be with the body when the body disintegrates. During dissolution, this combination disintegrates and consciousness vanishes. One cannot perceive consciousness apart from the body, thus the *Cārvākā* prove that consciousness is a property of the body and not of the soul. They also add, "What people mean by a soul is nothing more than the conscious living body (*Caitanya-Visista deha eva ātmā*). The non-material soul is never perceived"². Thus, when there is no existence of a soul apart from the body, there is no question of the immortality of the soul. *Carvākā* do not believe in the immortality of the soul, previous life, after-life, rebirth, transmigration of the soul and so on and in short, to *Cārvāka* all these words are meaningless.

There are two different views among *Cārvākā* regarding the inalienability of consciousness from the body. One sect of *Cārvākā* called the *Dhūrta Carvākā* totally denied the existence of the self-other than the body. The other sect called *suśikṣita Cārvākā* or the cultured *Carvākā*, maintain that there is a 'self' other than the body. This self is the knower, recollecter and the enjoyer, but it is destroyed along with the body. When the body disintegrates, it is also destroyed. The *suśikṣita Cārvākā* admit that the self exists as long as the body exists.

The Jaina view

Jains believe in the individual self-called *jīvā*. The self is eternal and independent. Jains categorise *jīvā* as a conscious substance (*dravya*). Consciousness, according to Jains, is not the soul's accidental quality, but it is the essence of the soul. Perception and knowledge are the essential

characteristics of consciousness. These qualities are hindered by karma matter. The soul gets soiled when it gets associated with the subtle particles of karmic matter. While dealing with the concept of the soul in Jaina philosophy, Sinha, the author says, "Infinite knowledge, infinite perception, infinite bliss, and infinite power for right action are innate in the soul. But they are obscured by karma-matter in the state of bondage. When the shackles of karma-matter is completely broken, the soul realises omniscience, eternal bliss and infinite power"³. The Jains maintain that the *jīva* in its pure form is omniscient. The tainted *jīvā*, is bonded and loses its omniscient qualities. For example, the ears in Jaina philosophy are perceived as an aid to hearing, but the difference from the usual view is that here it is viewed not as an aid but as a check put upon the absolute capacity of hearing of the soul. The main aim of the Jains is to get rid of these limitations of the soul and to regain the original nature of the self.

The self-occupies the body; it adjusts its size to the dimensions of the physical body where it stays. Thus, the soul is of the same size as the body it occupies. "Though it has no form (*mūrti*) it acquires like a light the size of the body where it lives."⁴ The relationship of the body and the soul is like the invisible fire in the wood or butter in the milk. Thus, even though the soul is different from the body, Jains maintain that the soul is co-extensive with the body it resides.

There are different kinds of *jīvas* and they are mainly divided into two major classes (i) the bonded souls (*baddha*) and (ii) the liberated souls (*muktas*). The fettered souls are further divided into higher and lower souls according to the number of sense organs they possess. The Jains believe in the transmigration of the soul.

Buddhist view

Buddha maintains in tune with his doctrine of *pratitya-samutpāda*, that there is no permanent 'self'. It is impermanent and the belief in a permanent self is a wrong concept of the self. The permanent identical substance such as the self as accepted by some philosophers is nothing but a mere imagination. Buddha says that people who suffer from this kind of imagination are ignorant of the nature of the 'self'. The word 'self' Buddha means as "a conventional label for the totality of any living being (individual)."⁵ It is the sum total of the psychical factors of individual existence, namely feelings, volition, and consciousness. The self is a stream of cognitions (*viññānasantāna*) which lasts just for a moment. Not only the self, but also any reality does not last for long time. Everything in this world exists as a series, for any length of time creating an illusion of sameness or identity; it is only a flux (*samtāna*). The self is thus, just a series (*vithi*), a succession of similar thing happening, and the idea of permanence, which we have of the self, is merely fictitious. It is just like "the flame of a lamp appears to be the same in any two moments; but really it signifies two separate states of it, which have no substantial identity. In other words, there are modifications but nothing that endures through them"⁹. Thus, as a case in point, Buddha illustrates the example of a flame to explain the illusion of sameness in the soul. The soul is just like the flame of a lamp that appears to be same in any two moments but we know that in reality it is not so. They are two separate states and nothing can be seen beyond that. Similarly, 'self' is a series of mental and physical processes, which are successive as well as impermanent. Buddhism vehemently proclaims that the self is nothing but the transient sensations and thoughts along with the physical frame. Any idea other than this about the soul can be dismissed as a superstition.

If Buddhism maintains that the self is, just a stream of consciousness then it may be asked how it can account for memory, the law of karma, and the concept of cyclic nature of birth. If there is no identity of the self, then how can one account for all these things. For this, it argues that the idea, which is there in the self, a particular moment ago, leaves its impression on the self at the next moment. This happens continuously to enable the soul at any moment to get the impression of the previous moment

and leaves the indelible mark on the succeeding moment. This is again explained with the example of a burning lamp. Each moment, the flame depends on its own conditions and it is certainly different from that of another moment, which definitely depends on some other conditions. Even though it is so, we see a succession of the different flames and we imagine the presence of continuity in them. Just like the flame, the consciousness of this moment inherits its character from previous ones and the future moment will get its character from the present moment. The past continues to exist in the present and the present again continues to exist in the future. One can see the incessant succession of events. Thus even though the person is not the same at any particular two instants, still he is able to carry on the idea or the impression, that enables him to store the past events in his memory. The continuity that we observe in the life series is based on a causal connection running through the different moments. Memory thus becomes an explicate even in the absence of a soul.

Buddhism also claims that a new life, that is birth, can be generated from an old life just as one flame can be lighted from another. Thus, the question of rebirth is also convincingly answered. It does not consider rebirth as transmigration but it accepts the present soul as the cause of the next life. It maintains that the soul does not migrate whereas karma does.

The later school of Buddhism, the *Mahāyāna* school, accepts the existence of the transcendental 'self' (*Mahātman*). It recognises this as the self of all beings. Like the early Buddhist thinkers, they also deny and refute the existence of the Individual Selves but accept the Universal Self as the reality behind all phenomena.

Nyaya-Vaiśeika view

Nyāya-Vaiśeika accepts the 'self' or *ātman* as a unique, eternal and all-pervading substance (*dravya*). The self is accepted as a substance because the *Nyaya-Vaiśeika* notes that it is the inherent cause of cognitions, pleasure, pain, desire, aversion, volition impression, merit and demerit are the qualities of the self. Among these qualities, merit and demerit are permanent and they subsist in it. They are not directly perceived but only inferred. The remaining qualities of the soul are only temporary but are felt directly. The self is the basis of psychic life, but that life is only adventitious to it.

Consciousness is also considered as an intrinsic attribute of the self. It is awakened in the self by the latter's relation with the manas. Only when the self comes into contact with manas consciousness arises, thus the self as matter is devoid of consciousness, according to *Nyaya-Vaiśeika*. Consciousness is not the essential or permanent quality of the self. It is during the temporary contact between the body and the manas, the self, after coming into contact with manas gets consciousness. The true nature of the self is distinct from the body and all other objects.

The individual self, according to *Nyaya-Vaiśeika* is not one but many-fold. It believes in the plurality of selves. "The selves are many; and, although they are all-pervading, their capacity to know, feel and will is ordinarily manifested through the physical organism with which each of them is associated for the time being"⁷. Thus, the plurality of selves is inferred from the variety of experiences of different souls. While discussing the freedom of the will, the *Nyāya-Vaiśeika* accepts the relative freedom of the will. It says that the divine will and the law of karma limit the self. It also believes in the transmigration of the self, and this happens until it attains liberation.

Sāṃkhya-yoga view

One of the two basic categories accepted by the *Sāṃkhya* is the self (*puruṣa*). *Puruṣa* is the soul, the self, the spirit, the subject and the knower. According to *Samkhya* there is no need for any

proof to establish the existence of the self, for it is a self-manifestation. All must admit the 'self' since everybody feels and asserts that it exists. This feeling of one's existence is sufficient, and it is the most natural and authentic experience that all have. If an individual ventures into the non-existence of the self, he presupposes the validity of the self. The self is a self-manifest and its non-existence cannot be proved in any way.

Sāmkhya maintains that the self is completely different from the body, the senses, the 'manas' and the intellect. "The self is quite distinct from the mind-body complex and is therefore, beyond all the affection and afflictions of the psychical life"⁸. Thus, according to *Sāmkhya*, *Purusa* is distinct from *prakṛti*. *Purusa* is omnipresent (*Sarvatraga*), eternal (*nitya*), pure (*suddha*), conscious (*buddha*), ubiquitous (*vibhu*) and liberated (*ī*Purusa is inactive (*niṣkriya*), because it is devoid of desire, aversion, and volition. It is probably to be active when it identifies wrongly with *gunas*, which are ever active. The self is inactive but conscious and it is a conscious spirit and is always the subject of knowledge. It cannot become at any time the object of any knowledge. According to the classical *Sāmkhya*, consciousness is not an attribute of the self.

The *Sāmkhya* accepts plurality of *Purusa*. Reality is, according to them, a plurality of selves and the world that is presented to them. "The plurality of *Puruṣa* is sought to be deduced from the observed distinctions in men's temperaments. The mental or moral disposition of no two persons is identical; nor is their reaction to their social or physical environment the same"⁹. This proves the theory of *Sāmkhya* regarding the existence of many souls.

Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā view

The classical *Mīmāṃsā* accepts the existence of self for the simple reason that if the self is not accepted as existing then the Vedic text will become meaningless. In the Vedas, instructions are given for the self to perform certain sacrifices to attain here, therefore according to *Mīmāṃsakas* 'self' exist. Bhatta school of *Mīmāṃsā* regards the self as self-illuminated or perceptible through *manas*. It holds the view that the self is directly known through an internal perception. The self cannot be known whenever any object is known; it is known only when we reflect on the self. We come to know the self as the object of self-consciousness (*aham-vṛtti*). The *Prābhākara* school does not accept this, it does not regard the self as an object of perception by the *manas*, but as manifested as the knower in every act of perception of an object. Thus, according to the *Prābhākara* School "Self is not known through itself, but through self-revealing knowledge which reveals both the self as the knower, and the object of knowledge in one single act of perception"¹⁰. They say that the very idea of the self-consciousness is not acceptable because the self cannot be both subject and the object of the same act of knowledge. This is tantamount to saying that food can be both the cook and the cooked. The *Mīmāṃsakās* admit the soul as an eternal being. Souls are many in number yet they are eternal and all pervasive, they are the supporters of knowledge, pleasure, pain, and so on, the self undergoes changes but still it is eternal. They are an infinite substance related to a real body in a real world and they are recognised as distinct from the body, the senses, and the *buddhi*. According to *Mīmāṃsakās*, consciousness is an adventitious quality and it is not the essence of the self. Consciousness is generated in the self when certain conditions are present. When there is a contact between sense and object, one can see the consciousness in self. In certain other conditions like dreamless sleep and in the state of liberation the consciousness in the self is absent. Thus, consciousness is only an adventitious quality for them. *Prābhākara* recognises nine different qualities of the self. They are cognition, pleasure, pain, desire, aversion, volition, merit, demerit, and impression. These qualities are produced when the self is in relation with the internal organ *manas*.

Mīmāṃsā accepts the plurality of the selves, and it regards the soul as not one but many-fold. The school accepts a distinct self in each body. Just as my own actions are due to my soul, other actions by other individuals are due to other souls existing in them. Dharma and adharma, which are the qualities of the self, also differ, proving the plurality of the souls.

The self assumes a body according to its merits and limitations acquired in the previous birth. When the merits and limitations are exhausted, it attains its pure and transcendental condition. This condition is the pure state, and it is said to be in the liberated state. If this state is not attained, the soul transmigrates into another body according to its merits and limitations.

Sankaras' view

In the view of *Śaṅkara*, the existence of self is immediately known. The self exists there and there is no doubt about it, it is indubitable and indisputable, according to *Śaṅkara*. He never thinks that the existence of self (*atman*) needs to be proved by any argument. The self is self-manifest in every one of us. Everybody believes in his or her own existence and nobody ever thinks that he does not exist. Thus, we know the Atman because of its immediate presentation. The existence of the self is beyond all proof. Atman cannot be doubted because it is the very basis of all proof and is established prior to them. The very basic question is what is self? In addition, what are the means to identify it? *Śaṅkara's* answer is that a process of elimination can grasp the idea of the self. All attributes that are found to contradict our consciousness of freedom and timeless being are denied. The attributes given to the self which goes against the freedom and eternity cannot be taken as self. Thus, these qualities are denied saying 'not this' 'not this'. The Self is not this, not this, '*neti neti*'. "The attributes that are denied of the self include

- (1) all things and relations of the outer world
- (2) the body consisting of the gross elements
- (3) the sense organs
- (4) the mind and the vital airs"

All the above-mentioned things are eliminated as 'not-I' 'not-I'. The Self is not the body, not the senses; it is not even the mind or intellect. It is identified with consciousness itself. By this process of elimination, Samara characterises the self as existence (*Sat*), consciousness (*Cit*) and bliss (*ānanda*).

The unqualified monism of *Śaṅkara* views that the self is identical with Brahman. The self is identical with God and it is the supreme Brahman- the self-luminous, infinite consciousness. It is the non-dual reality of the Brahman, 'Atman ca Brahman' to quote *Śaṅkara Bhāṣya*. The saying 'that thou art' suggests that there is an unqualified identity between the soul that underlies the finite man and God. Brahman incarnates both as the world and as the self (*jīvā*). It is nothing but Brahman appearing through *upādhi* (adjuncts), which are all elements of the physical world, and they are all illusory. Brahman shows itself as the world and as the individual self. Brahman displays itself as the world is an illusory manifestation of Brahman, and Brahman appearing as the individual subject, is Brahman itself but under limitations.

The *Cit* is the transcendental metaphysical self and the *jīvā* is the empirical phenomenal self. The individual self or the *jīvā* is neither a part nor different from Brahman. Thus, *jīvā* is from Brahman from which the world proceeds, in which it subsists and into which it returns. The atman is the unchangeable essence of our being, a timeless, space less, noumenal reality which is the only true

reality. It has nothing outside or beyond it and all that appears other than it is *māyā* (mysterious) like a dream or illusion. The gross body and the subtle body are the products of *māyā*. Thus, the atman does not enjoy anything in its original state. It is an inactive agent and hence there is no merit or limitation as such in *ātman* and hence birth or death has no influence on *ātman*. Transmigration is there but it is because of the nescience (*avidyā*) attached to it in the empirical existence. It is one but appears as many because of nescience. All activities belong to the empirical self and not to the atman. The transcendental Self is the Absolute. The difference between the empirical self and the transcendental self is not real but only phenomenal, caused by nescience. The transcendental self is the witness-intelligence that, while being self-luminous, illumines all other objects. It is not revealed by any other consciousness. In fact, it is the one, which reveals all objects and cognitions. The transcendental self is neither a subject nor an object. It is pure and eternal consciousness. Thus, in its essential nature Śāṅkara holds that the atman is one, eternal, homogeneous, and consciousness is its essential nature. Consciousness is inseparable and indistinguishable from the 'self'. The consciousness of the self, when bonded, will be limited. There are three different levels of ordinary consciousness, which are limited; namely, waking experience, dream, and dreamless sleep. This bondage is due to ignorance. The beginning or the origin of ignorance is not to be traced. The soul, by mistake, wrongly associates itself with the body, gross and subtle. This is known as bondage. In this state it is unaware of its original nature, "the individual (*jīva*) can then be imagined metaphorically as but the reflection (*pratibimba*) of the Infinite Consciousness on the finite mirror of ignorance (*avidyā*) and compared to one of the many reflections of the moon cast on different receptacles of water"¹². Thus it wrongly gets reflected and becomes limited. When 'Self' is freed from ignorance it is liberated, and becomes Brahman. Liberation is nothing but getting rid of the illusion. When the self-realises its original nature, namely, pure consciousness, it realises its blissful nature. Pure consciousness is nothing but absolute bliss. The self so far covered by the *upadhis* now ceases to exist, now in liberation, the non-dual self-the Atman or Brahman, the bliss-absolute alone exists. Thus, according to Śāṅkara the Brahman is the only reality.

Viśiṭādvaita view

Ramanuja, the chief exponent of *Viśiṭādvaita*, has accepted the qualified identity between Brahman and the self. He emphatically says that there is an identity as well as a difference between the self and the Brahman. The individual self is not a vein variation of the Absolute but still it is a mode of Brahman. According to Ramanuja, the *Upanisadic* dictum 'that thou art' (*Tat tvam asi*) must be understood in the same way as we understand the statement 'this is that Devadatta'. 'That' refers to God, the creator of the Universe; 'Thou' refers to God existing in the empirical world as a man, the embodied soul. Thus, God with certain attributes or other is compared and ascertained. The same substance with different qualities is asserted here.

The relation between the soul and body is not one of mere conjunctions but it is more than that. Ramanuja terms the relation that exists between the soul and the body as *aprthak-siddhi*, which means 'inseparability'. The soul and the body cannot exist independently. One cannot be understood without understanding the other. Thus, Ramanuja maintained that the Brahman, the soul, and the phenomenal world are all different; however, they are equally eternal and inseparable.

The relation that exists between God and the soul is unique in *Viśi tādvaita*. They maintain that the *jīva* is different from God, it is always dependent on it, and the soul is described as a *prakāra* of God and not an independent entity. God is the inner controller of the soul. Soul is perceived as God's 'body', and the immanent God controls the body. Thus, the souls and matter "are the *prakaras* (modes), *sesas* (means, accessories) or *niyāmyas* (the controlled) while Brahman is the *prakari* (supporter), *niyanta* (controller), and the principle (end sesi) "¹³. God controls the self and the world, and the soul's freedom

is subject to the will of the God. The relation between God and the soul is like that of a master and a mastered. Brahman is the Lord who creates, controls, preserves, and destroys, and he is omniscient, independent and pure. The servant, the embodied soul, is created, controlled, preserved, destroyed, and governed by the Lord, and it subsists in Him. The soul is nothing but a part of God. As a support to this, it is pointed out that Ramanuja regards God as having souls (the conscious) and matter (the unconscious) as His attributes (*citacit viṣiṣṭa*). God is a combination of both *cit* and *acit*.

Though the self in *Viśiṣṭādvaita* is dependent on God, it is real, unique, eternal, intelligent, self-conscious, partless, changeless and atomic. The self is of the nature of knowledge, bliss, and purity. It cannot be perceived through the sense organs and it is the knower, the agent and the enjoyer. Consciousness is the intrinsic essence of the soul. It is the substrate of consciousness. The soul is all pervasive and therefore it can penetrate into every substance. It has no birth or death and is eternal. Birth and death is nothing but the association and disassociation of soul with body. It is a spiritual monad subsisting in God. It is a soul in relation to its body and it is a body in relation to God.

Ramanuja believes in the plurality of selves and recognises three types of selves. The first type are free from bondage, the second type refers to those that have bonded and subsequently got liberation through self-discipline, and the third type includes those still in bondage and in the process of transmigration.

The individual soul is ignorant of its real original nature of purity and bliss; it wrongly associates with the material body and undergoes protracted sufferings. Ignorance (*avidyā*) has no beginning and generates action, which leads to merits and limitations. This *avidyā* veils the intrinsic quality of the self to the self. When this *avidyā* is destroyed, the original nature of the self is realised. This can be achieved, according to Ramanuja, by renunciation, devotion, moral discipline and total surrender to God. The liberated soul has a direct perception of Brahman and is absorbed in the eternal bliss of union with God (*Sāyujya*). It realises not only its true nature but also its dependent nature on God.

Thus, one can see that Ramanuja's view brings together pluralism and monism on the one hand moralism and mysticism on the other by his concept of *jīvā* as a moral, spiritual and a free entity. Ramanuja also reiterates the idea that the *jīvā* is a spark of the supreme self, an organism, and an organ of the absolute Brahman. Every *jīvā* comes from the Supreme and returns to Him. Ramanuja concludes that the self is a distinct centre of consciousness real and unchanging within God.

Dvaita view

Madhva, who was the first to expound Dvaita Vedanta systematically, rejects all attempts to reduce souls and the world to a mere illusion or as a part of God. He propagates the absolute dualism and brings out the difference between the independent Supreme Being (*Paramatman*) and the dependent principle of life (*Jivātman*). He maintained that the *jīvā's*, are different from God, and they are not identical. God is the master who is worshipped and the *jīvās* are mere servants who worship God. The deity and the devotee are different from each other. The famous dictum of the Upaniṣads '*Tat tvam asi*' does not convey identity of the soul with God, instead it means that the soul has similarity in essence with God.

The world consists of conscious souls or knower. Individual souls, according to Dvaita, are numberless and atomic in size. Dvaita believes in the plurality of selves. Though they are infinite in number, each soul is fundamentally distinct from the other. It is a qualitative and quantitative pluralism of souls. The individual soul (*jīvā*) is the knower, enjoyer, and doer and above all, it is partless and

eternal. By nature, the soul is conscious and blissful. It is atomic in size and yet it can experience sensations in its entire body like a lamp, which illumines a whole room by its light.

The souls are the real knowers (*jnātā*), real agents (*kartā*) and real enjoyers (*bhokta*) even though God controls them.

Madhva recognises three kinds of souls.

- ▶ Eternally free souls (*nityamukta*)
- ▶ Liberated souls (*mukta*)
- ▶ The bonded souls (*baddha*)

The bondage of soul is due to the ignorance of the knowledge of difference between the *jīva* and the God. When this knowledge of difference is attained, the soul will be liberated from the firm bondage. This knowledge for liberation can be attained by devotion and performance of duties. The *jīva* gets liberated because of the grace of God. After the release, the soul attains its original state of purity. It attains similarity with God, but at the same time at no point of time, the soul loses its identity with God. Thus, the soul in Dvaita has a finite knowledge, limited power and is absolutely dependent on God.

Śaiva-Siddhānta view

Śaiva-Siddhānta is the South Indian school of Saivism. It accepts three main categories, they are *pati* (God), *paśu* (Soul) and *pāśa* (bondage). According to this system, God, soul and bondage are the three realities and so the *Siddhānta* is a pluralistic realism. Soul (*paśu*) is one of the three principles of reality accepted by *Śaiva-Siddhānta* and the individual souls are bound by the rope of '*avidya*' to this world; therefore, they are called as *pasu* which are all pervasive, eternal, conscious and active and enjoys as well. At the same time, it is non-atomic. *Siddhāntin* accepted the plurality of souls that are many because birth and death are witnessed in different perspectives.

The souls are tainted and tormented by the impurities, and due to this reason, they become embodied. By nature, they are infinite and pervasive but since they are associated with impurities (*malas*) or bonds (*pāśa*) they experience themselves as finite, limited and parsicent. Based on the levels of the impurities, the souls are classified into three groups: *sakala*, *pralayakala* and *vijñānākala*. Here, '*kala*' means a part or particles and it refers to the conditions of empirical existence. The soul tainted with the *anava* mala only is called *vijñānākala*, the soul tainted with the karma mala also is known as *pralayakala* and finally the soul tainted with *māya* mala also is called as *sakala*. The levels of the three kinds of souls are called *suddha-avastha*, respectively. *Kevalaavastha* and *sakala-avastha*.

The soul limited by the *anava* mala acts and enjoys the world, and this is the result of its past deeds. It acts in a certain way because of the appetite and aversion and acquires merit and demerit, which constitute the impurity of *karman*. This karma conditions the soul's transmigratory course, and it is a blind force; it cannot work by itself; it needs the guidance of someone, and according to *Śaiva-Siddhānta* Śiva is the force behind the karman. Siva guides it through the grace of Siva the soul could extricate itself from the stronghold of karman. When the souls are purged of impurities by the grace of God, they attain absoluteness (*Śivatā*). In this state, they acquire infinite knowledge and creative power.

According to the *Siddhāntin*, one of the main features of the soul is that it assumes the quality of the entity, to which it is associated. Meykanda speaks of it as *adu-adu-adal* (becoming that and that).

When in bondage it assumes the quality of mala and when it is freed from bondage, it acquires the nature of Śiva. Therefore, they describe the soul as *sad-asat*. It becomes *asat* when it reflects mala and *sat* when it reflects Śiva. In the *kevala-avasta* state, it is *a-sat*, in the *sakala-avastha* it is *sad-asat*, and in the *suddha-avastha* it is *sat*.

Śaiva-Siddhānta propagates four different means to get rid of the malas to attain liberation. The four means are called as *cārya*, *kriya*, *yoga*, and *jnāna*. By following these paths and by the grace of God (*pati*) the soul attains liberation and realizes *Śivatva* and this is called '*moksa*'. In this stage of *Śivatva* also, because of the *prārabdha-karman*, it is still embodied but without getting itself affected by the karmas. This state of *Śivatva* does not mean that the soul becomes one with God. The basic difference between the soul and Śiva is maintained even in the state of liberation. As an entity, the liberated soul is different from God: though the *jīvā* can claim God's nature as its own. The difference between the soul in bondage and in freedom is that while in the former the soul's experience is through *pāsa* (bond), in the latter it is through *pati* (God), which is known as *patijñāna*. *Śaiva-Siddhānta* also holds that the liberated soul does not become identical with God even though the soul realises His nature.

Conclusion

Thus, there are multiple conceptions of self; some philosophers are of the view that the self is created. They argue that the self is not eternal but is created. According to them, the self is not the cause of its own existence. It is created by some other source. Another concept is that the self is said to be an identity. It can be present in different activities and at different times. 'I' who is writing is the same 'I' who is reading and it is the same 'I' who is thinking. The 'I', even though doing different activities is the same 'I'. In yet another view, it is said that the soul is a spiritual substance. Here the soul is accepted as a substance, which has many qualities and activities as well. The *Advaitin* holds that the self is a self-manifestation and is immediately perceived. The *Saiva Siddhantin* accepts the self as one of the three realities postulated by them. If one has a thorough perusal of the history of philosophy, one can see the multiple types of conception of self in Indian Philosophy.

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