



## 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 the 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 *puruṣārtha* 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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 *Purāṇa*, liberation is the realiation of the true nature of the self by discarding the false nature that hides the real one.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Means of liberation

This *Purāṇa* 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* also.<sup>4</sup>

To overcome the hindrance, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* suggests the following eightfold yogic methods, namely, *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prāṇāyama*, *dhāraṇa*, *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 practices 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 meanings of the root *yuj* (i) *yujiryoge* meaning to join, (ii) *yuj samādhaui* i.e., in the sense of concentration, (iii) *yuj śnyamane* 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 cittavṛttinirodhaḥ*.”<sup>5</sup>

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), *prāṇāyama* (regulating of breath), *pratyāhāra* (withdrawal of the senses), *dhyāna* (meditation), *dhāraṇā* (contemplation) and *samādhi* (concentration)<sup>6</sup>. Of these the first five are called *bahira 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 disciplines of *Yoga*, the mind is able to think of the supreme God. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, it is clearly mentioned that by practicing *yoga* one can become tranquil, pure and righteous and which paves the path to Brahman.<sup>7</sup> Again in the nineteenth chapter of the eleventh *skanda* of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the twelve divisions of (each) *yamas* and *niyams* are

found.<sup>8</sup> The *niyamas* are – *ahiṃsā* (non-fliction of pain), *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-stealing), *asaṅga* (non-attachments), *hriḥ* (modesty), *asaocaya* (non-storing), *āstikya* (faith in religion), *brahmacarya* (continence), *mauna* (silence), *sthairya* (steadiness) *kṣamā* (forgiveness) and *abhaya* (fearlessness). The *niyamas* are – *śauca* (bodily and mental purity), *japa* (mental repetition of the mantra), *tapas* (asceticism), *homa* (sacrificial offerings), *uradhā* (faith), *ātithya* (hospitality), *arcanā* (daily worship), *tīrthāmana* (visiting places of pilgrimages), *parārthehā* (desire for the supreme object), *tuṣṭi* (contentment) and *ācāryasevana* (service of the spiritual teacher)<sup>9</sup>

In the ninth chapter of the 7<sup>th</sup> 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), *śruta* (sacred knowledge), *tapas* (austeriyy), *adhayana* (study), *svadharmā* (observance of rules of own caste), *vyākhyā* (exposition of scriptures), *rahaḥ* (living in solitude), *japa* (recital of mantra) and *samādhi* (concentration) lead to liberation.<sup>10</sup>

*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.<sup>11</sup> There are various postures in which a *yogi* is directed to sit when he is engaged in meditation, e.g., *bhadrāsana* 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 *Sāṃkhya*, *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) *smaraṇa*- remembering His form, name etc; iv) *pādasevana*-serving His feet; v) *arcanam*- worshipping Him; vi) *vandanam*-saluting Him, vii) *dāsyam*-slavish serving God; viii) *sakhyam*-considering Him a friend; and IX) *ātmanibedanam* surrendering the self to Him.<sup>12</sup> *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 *sagūṇa* and *nirgūṇa*. *Sagūṇa bhakti* is prompted by three *guṇas* viz., *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*.<sup>13</sup> But the highest form of *bhakti* is *nirgūṇa*, 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.<sup>14</sup> 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 *sāttvika* 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 *nirgūṇa* type of *bhakti yoga*<sup>15</sup>. In this *Purāṇa*, Kapila instructs his mother about the characteristic feature of *nirgūṇa 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 *nirgūṇa 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 *nirgūṇa bhaktas*. Then liberation comes automatically.<sup>16</sup> The *nirgūṇa* 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 *sārsthī*, staying near Him is *sāmīpya*, similarity of form like him is *sārūpya* and even union with God is *ekatva*. These kind of *nirgūṇa bhaktas* don't accept anything except his service.<sup>17</sup>

According to *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *bhakti* is the highest *Puruṣārtha*. Again, states *bhakti* as the safest means to attain all kinds of *Puruṣārtha*. This *Purāṇa* enumerates nine kinds of *bhakti* viz., *srāvaṇa*, *kīrtana*, *smarana*, *pādasevana*, *arcana*, *bandana*, *dāśya*, *sākhya*, *ātmanivedanam*.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup>

*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* enumerates five types of liberation which are known as *sālokya*, *sarsti*, *sāmīpya*, *sārūpya* and *sāyujya* respectively.<sup>20</sup> Sridhara Swami says that *Sālokya* 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, *sāmīpya*, which is proximity to the supreme; *Sārūpya* means attaining the same form of as of *Īśvara*. *Sāyujya* is the highest form of liberation and means of the attainment of unity with God i.e. attaining Brahmanhood.<sup>21</sup>

## 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 *mokṣa* or liberation from the cycle of births and deaths in the material world.

## End notes

1. cetaḥ khalvasya bandhāya muktaye cātmano matam/gaGecu saktaA bandhāya rataA vā puAsi muktaye/ /BP., 3/25/15
2. Ibid., 11.1.2-4
3. muktirhitvā' nyathārūpa svarūpeṇa vyavasthitih/ Ibid., 2.10.6
4. BP, 11.20.6.
5. YS, 1.2
6. Ibid., 2.29
7. maoyenaiva vidhinā prasannaḥ yāti satpatham/ Ibid., 3.28. 1 (b)
8. ete yamāḥsaniyamā ubhayordvādaūa smṛtāḥ/ Ibid., 11. 19.3
9. ahimsā satyamasteyamasanṅgo hrīrasaocayam / āstikyambramacaryam ca maunam sthairyam sthairyam kcamābhayam// śaucaḥ japastapo homaḥ ūradhā'' tithyam madarcanam/ tīrthāmanam parārthehā tu cmirā cāryasevanam// Ibid., 11.9.33-34
10. maunavrataūrutatapo' dhyayanasvadharmavyākhyārahojapasamādhaya āpavargyāḥ/ Ibid., 7. 9. 46

11. sthīrasukhamāsanaA YS, 2.46
12. śravaṇaḥ kīrtanaḥ viṣṇu smaraṇaḥ pādasevanam/ arcanaḥ vandanaḥ dāsyāḥ sakhyamātmanivedanam/  
/ iti puḥ sārpitā viṣṇu bhaktiūcennavalakcaṇā/ kriyate bhagavatyaaddhā tanmanyē' 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. sālōkyasārctirsāmīpyasārūpyaikatvamapyuta/ dīyamānaḥ na grhḡanti vinā matsevanaḥjanā%// Ibid., 3.29.13
21. sālōkyāḥ mayā sahaikasmin loke vāsam, sārctir samānaiucayarm, sāmīpyam nikatavartitvam, sārūpyam  
samānarūpatām, ekatvaḥ sāyujyam.Sridhara Com. On Ibid., 3.29.13

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