

Self-Realization as Liberation: The Concept of Mukti in Advaita Vedānta

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Abstract: *The Advaita Vedānta's idea of Mukti (freedom) is examined in this essay, with a focus on how it can be understood as self-realization. Advaita Vedānta, in my opinion, offers one of the most profound philosophical formulations of liberation in the history of Indian thought by defining the realization of Ātman (the individual self) and Brahman (the absolute reality) as the ultimate aim of human life. The research examines the ontological underpinnings, philosophical ramifications, and ethical importance of the Advaitic understanding of freedom, mainly based on the teachings of the Upanishads and the systematic interpretations of Śaṅkarācārya. The paper examines how knowledge (jñāna) of the non-dual reality eliminates ignorance (avidyā) and reveals the innate freedom of the self, while ignorance (avidyā) produces the illusion of separateness and bondage. According to this perspective, freedom is the direct understanding of one's actual essence as pure consciousness rather than an external accomplishment or a post-mortem state. In addition to highlighting the Advaitic concept of jīvanmukti, which confirms the possibility of freedom while living, the debate delves deeper into the ethical and spiritual practices that prepare the individual for this realization. The paper argues that the Advaitic vision of self-realization continues to provide important insights into issues of human freedom, identity, and spiritual fulfilment by placing the Advaita Vedānta concept of Mukti within both its classical philosophical context and contemporary intellectual discourse. The Advaitic conception of liberation offers a significant philosophical viewpoint that stresses inner transformation, universal unity, and the realization of the deepest aspects of human consciousness in a contemporary world frequently marked by existential anxiety and material preoccupation.*

Keywords: Advaita Vedānta, Mukti, Self-Realization, Ātman, Brahman, Non-duality, Jīvanmukti

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1 | INTRODUCTION

The Advaita Vedānta philosophical philosophy places a strong emphasis on the idea of Mukti, or liberation, which is defined as realizing the true nature of the self (Ātman) and its identity with the ultimate reality (Brahman). In my view, the Advaitic conception of freedom is a profound existential knowledge of the essence of human life and spiritual fulfillment rather than just a metaphysical philosophy. The philosophy of Advaita Vedānta, methodically articulated by Śaṅkarācārya, portrays Mukti as the climax of spiritual knowledge, where the individual transcends ignorance (avidyā) and discovers the non-dual unity of being. According to this theory, emancipation is the realization of an everlasting truth that has always existed within the self rather than something that is newly created. The Upanishadic tradition, which frequently highlights the identity between the individual ego and the ultimate reality, is where the roots of this idea can be found. In the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, the sage Uddālaka gives his son Śvetaketu the renowned instruction “Tat Tvam Asi” (That Thou Art), which highlights the fundamental unity of the self with the absolute. This is one of the most well-known statements of this insight (Radhakrishnan, 1953, p. 447). These claims demonstrate that realizing one’s inner nature directly leads to emancipation rather than external rituals or material accomplishments. The Upanishadic sages defined freedom as “the awakening of the individual to the realization that his deepest self is identical with the universal spirit,” as Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan notes (Radhakrishnan, 1953, p. 35). This realization established the conceptual foundation for Advaita Vedānta’s systematic conception of freedom.

By highlighting the importance of self-knowledge (ātma-jñāna) as the path to liberation, Śaṅkara offers the most important interpretation of Mukti in the Advaita tradition. He claims that ignorance of the fundamental nature of the self, which causes people to connect with their body, mind, and empirical personality, is the root cause of bondage. Therefore, the eradication of this ignorance by the understanding of Brahman is liberation. According to Śaṅkara’s commentary on the Brahma Sūtra, “the knowledge of the identity of the self and Brahman destroys ignorance and leads to liberation” (Saṅkara, 1962, p. 18). According to this viewpoint, Mukti is not so much a physical or spatial shift as it is essentially an alteration of awareness. The illusion of separateness vanishes when actual knowledge emerges, exposing the fundamental unity of existence. Advaita’s emphasis on the difference between ultimate reality and empirical reality is another significant aspect of its conception of emancipation. According to Advaita Vedānta, ignorance and illusion (māyā) form the universe perceived via the senses, hiding Brahman’s essential essence. The realization of the self as Brahman therefore implies transcending the constraints of empirical perception. According to T. M. P. Mahadevan, liberation in Advaita Vedānta is “the direct intuitive experience of the non-dual reality in which the distinction between subject and object disappears” (Mahadevan, 1969, p. 113). The ultimate purpose of human existence and the pinnacle of spiritual knowledge are represented by this experience of non-duality (advaita).

Additionally, the Advaitic understanding of Mukti emphasizes the potential for freedom in this life (jīvanmukti), which offers the theory significant existential and ethical implications. A liberated person lives in the world with a transformed awareness, free from attachment, ignorance, and egoistic cravings, rather than necessarily being cut off from it. The enlightened individual understands that the self is pure consciousness beyond all earthly constraints, as explained by Śaṅkara in his commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā (Śaṅkara, 2000, p. 56). A condition of inner liberation and spiritual serenity results from such realization. The Advaita Vedānta interpretation of Mukti, in my opinion, presents a profound philosophical vision of human liberation that combines spiritual experience with metaphysical insight. It portrays self-realization as the pinnacle of knowledge and the pinnacle of human achievement. The Advaitic ideal of emancipation encourages people to uncover the deeper aspects of their own consciousness in a modern world that is frequently dominated by financial goals and existential worry. Advaita Vedānta offers both a philosophical explanation of reality and a transforming route to inner liberation and spiritual awakening by highlighting the oneness of the self and the absolute.

2 | METAPHYSICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ADVAITA VEDĀNTA:

Advaita Vedānta's metaphysical underpinnings offer a conceptual framework for comprehending the idea of Mukti, or liberation, as self-realization. In my view, the foundation of Advaita philosophy is the principle of non-duality (advaita), which states that Brahman, a single, indivisible, and absolute consciousness, is the ultimate reality. Advaita philosophy is based on this metaphysical realization, which influences how it views the nature of the self, the world, and emancipation. This perspective holds that ignorance (avidyā), which hides the knowledge of the fundamental oneness of existence, is the source of the universe's apparent plurality, which is not ultimately real. Advaita Vedānta's metaphysical perspective is mostly derived from the Upanishads. The distinction between Ātman (the individual ego) and Brahman (the absolute reality) is emphasized constantly in these writings. The Bāhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad contains one of the most important statements of this identity: "Aham Brahmāsmi" (I am Brahman), which implies that the innermost self is not distinct from the ultimate source of reality (Radhakrishnan, 1953, p. 168). This is a fundamental metaphysical assertion: the universal consciousness that underlies all experiences is the same as the essence of human being. The Upanishadic seers found that "the ultimate reality is not an external object but the deepest self of the individual," according to Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (Radhakrishnan, 1953, p. 75). Such findings set the groundwork for the eventual systematic formulation of non-dual philosophy in Advaita Vedānta.

With his thorough interpretation of the Upanishadic teachings, Śāṅkarācārya was the most important philosopher to express this philosophical framework. According to Śāṅkara, the empirical world is a relative appearance conditioned by ignorance, and Brahman is the only ultimate reality (paramārthika satya). "Brahman is real, the world is an appearance, and the individual self is not different from Brahman," writes Śāṅkara in his commentary on the Brahma Sūtra (Śāṅkara, 1962, p. 22). The core of Advaita metaphysics is captured in this well-known statement. The world exists as a manifestation inside the framework of māyā, the cosmic principle that gives rise to the appearance of multiplicity; it is not wholly unreal but does not have the same degree of actuality as Brahman. Advaita's metaphysical explanation of the connection between the absolute and the empirical world heavily relies on the idea of māyā. Māyā is defined as the force of illusion or ignorance that leads people to see difference and diversity while, in reality, there is only unity. The everlasting and undivided Brahman manifests as the multifaceted universe of things and experiences through māyā. "Māyā is the principle that accounts for the appearance of plurality in a reality that is essentially one and indivisible," according to philosopher T. M. P. Mahadevan (Mahadevan, 1969, p. 87). Advaita Vedānta is able to reconcile the metaphysical claim of non-duality with the experience of the empirical world thanks to this doctrine.

The contrast between several levels of reality is another crucial component of Advaita metaphysics. Advaita philosophers typically make a distinction between three levels: the illusory level (prātibhāsika), the empirical level (vyāvahārika), and the absolute level (paramārthika). Brahman, which is eternal, unchanging, and unaffected by everything, is referred to as the absolute level. The illusory level describes false perceptions like seeing a snake in a rope, but the empirical level describes the world as experienced through everyday perception and social interaction. Advaita Vedānta explains how the empirical world can function meaningfully without being ultimately real, according to S. C. Chatterjee and D. M. Datta (Chatterjee & Datta, 2016, p. 347). Advaita thus upholds the ultimate supremacy of non-dual reality as well as the practical validity of ordinary experience. The Advaita Vedānta's metaphysical framework offers a profound philosophical vision in which pure consciousness is seen as the ultimate nature of existence. By claiming the identity of Ātman and Brahman, Advaita challenges the usual notion of separateness and shows a deeper unity underlying all kinds of existence. This metaphysical realization directly affects the idea of liberation and is not only theoretical. Mukti means discovering what has always been true rather than achieving something new if the individual self is already equal to the absolute reality. Therefore, the conceptual grounding necessary to comprehend self-realization as the ultimate

goal of human life and the highest form of liberation is provided by the metaphysical underpinnings of Advaita Vedānta.

3 | THE NATURE OF MUKTI IN ADVAITA VEDĀNTA

Within the Advaita Vedānta philosophical framework, the concept of Mukti, or emancipation, holds a fundamental place. It is typically interpreted as the realization of the true essence of the self. In my view, the metaphysical realization that the individual self (Ātman) is the same as the ultimate reality (Brahman) is the foundation of the Advaitic interpretation of Mukti. Therefore, liberation is the direct realization of an everlasting truth that has always existed rather than the achievement of a new state or the gain of an external reward. Humans are inherently free, but ignorance (avidyā) keeps this reality hidden. Thus, mukti represents the eradication of ignorance and the realization of one's own essence. The Upanishads' teachings, which consistently highlight the identity between the individual self and the universal spirit, serve as the foundation for the Advaita tradition's understanding of freedom. The realization "Aham Brahmāsmi" (I am Brahman), which expresses the ultimate understanding of the self, is one of the most famous statements of this insight found in the Bæhadāraᅇyaka Upaniᅇad (Radhakrishnan, 1953, p. 168). The shattering of the illusion of separateness and the completion of spiritual inquiry is symbolized by this understanding. The Upanishadic concept of freedom, according to Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, is "the discovery that the true self of man is identical with the infinite spirit which is the ground of the universe" (Radhakrishnan, 1953, p. 82). This realization makes it clear that emancipation is fundamentally a shift in consciousness rather than a modification of one's physical or spatial existence.

The works of Śaᅇkarācārya, who contends that freedom is attained by understanding the identity of Ātman and Brahman, contain the most methodical explanation of the nature of Mukti in Advaita Vedānta. According to Śaᅇkara, ignorance leads people to identify with their body, mind, and empirical personality; hence, bondage is not real in the ultimate sense. This illusion vanishes when genuine knowledge emerges, exposing the innate freedom of the self. In his commentary on the Brahma Sūtra, Śaᅇkara explicitly maintains that "liberation is the manifestation of the self's true nature after the destruction of ignorance" (Śaᅇkara, 1962, p. 32). This viewpoint emphasizes the epistemological nature of liberation in Advaita Vedānta: the direct path to freedom is knowledge (jᅇāna). The dichotomy between videhamukti (freedom after death) and jīvanmukti (liberation while living) is another crucial aspect of the Advaitic understanding of Mukti. The concept of jīvanmukti emphasizes the potential for achieving spiritual liberation while remaining in the material realm. While engaging in daily tasks, a liberated person maintains an inward detachment from worldly attachments and delusions. The liberated individual "lives in the world but is no longer bound by it, for he has realized the unity of the self with the absolute reality," according to T. M. P. Mahadevan (Mahadevan, 1969, p. 124). This concept demonstrates that emancipation is a live spiritual potential rather than just a far-off theoretical ideal, reflecting the practical and existential importance of Advaita Vedānta.

Moreover, the full transcendence of duality is part of the character of Mukti in Advaita Vedānta. People see themselves as distinct subjects interacting with an external world of things in everyday life. But this dualistic view is the result of ignorance, according to Advaita philosophy. When non-dual consciousness is realized and this duality is overcome, liberation takes place. As S. C. Chatterjee and D. M. Datta describe, emancipation in Advaita Vedānta is "the intuitive realization of the non-dual Brahman in which all distinctions between knower, known, and knowledge disappear" (Chatterjee & Datta, 2016, p. 353). The pinnacle of spiritual knowledge and the pinnacle of human fulfillment are represented by this condition of realization. The Advaitic idea of Mukti, in my opinion, provides a deep philosophical understanding of human freedom. It highlights that internal ignorance of one's own inner nature, rather than external constraints, is the ultimate challenge of human existence. People might see their innate connectedness with the ultimate truth by conquering this ignorance with knowledge and spiritual understanding. Mukti is the pinnacle of self-realization and the end of the spiritual journey in this sense.

The Advaita Vedānta understanding of liberation therefore gives not just a metaphysical explanation of human existence but also a transformational vision of inner freedom that continues to inspire philosophical reflection and spiritual inquiry in the modern world.

4 | ETHICAL AND SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF LIBERATION

Advaita Vedānta's concept of freedom (Mukti) has significant ethical and spiritual ramifications for human existence in addition to being a metaphysical revelation. Advaita philosophy, in my opinion, portrays liberation as a complete metamorphosis of the individual's style of being, wherein moral behaviour, spiritual discipline, and inner cleansing become necessary prerequisites for achieving self-realization. Advaita Vedānta acknowledges that ethical preparation and spiritual discipline are vital for establishing the purity of mind required to realize the reality of non-duality, even if it ultimately emphasizes knowledge (jñāna) as the direct way to freedom. In this sense, the Advaitic road to comprehending the identity of Ātman and Brahman is inextricably linked to the ethical and spiritual aspects of liberation. Advaita Vedānta's core inspiration comes from the Upanishadic tradition, which continuously stresses the moral and spiritual reform necessary to realize the ultimate truth. For instance, the Kaṭha Upaniṣad emphasizes the need of moral purity and spiritual discipline in the quest for liberation, stating that people who lack self-control and spiritual determination cannot achieve the self. "This Self cannot be attained by one who lacks strength, nor through heedlessness, nor without discipline," according to the text (Radhakrishnan, 1953, p. 615). This revelation reflects the idea that self-realization necessitates not just intellectual knowledge but also a deep interior transformation marked by spiritual dedication and ethical consciousness.

Through the notion of sādhana catuṣṭaya, or the fourfold discipline required for the acquisition of spiritual knowledge, Śaṅkarācārya expands on these ethical conditions in Advaita Vedānta. Discrimination between the eternal and the non-eternal (viveka), detachment from worldly pleasures (vairāgya), the development of moral virtues like self-control and calm, and a strong desire for liberation (mumukṣutva) are some of these. Through mental purification and the removal of barriers brought about by ignorance and attachment, these disciplines prepare the seeker for the realization of the highest truth. "The attainment of liberation depends primarily upon discrimination between the real and the unreal, together with renunciation and the cultivation of inner virtues," states Śaṅkara in Vivekachudamani (Śaṅkara, 1978, p. 19). This assertion makes it abundantly evident that spiritual discipline and ethical development are essential components of the Advaitic route to emancipation. Another key ethical facet of emancipation in Advaita Vedānta is the changing of one's relationship with the world and other living creatures. The distinction between oneself and others eventually fades when one recognizes the non-dual character of reality, resulting in a greater sense of compassion and universal care. Attitudes of non-violence, humility, and empathy are naturally inspired by the knowledge that all beings are infused with the same divine consciousness. The Advaitic realization of unity, according to philosopher S. C. Chatterjee, inspires people to rise above egoistic aspirations and develop a universal ethical perspective based on spiritual awareness (Chatterjee & Datta, 2016, p. 356). Therefore, the ethical implications of Advaita Vedānta encompass a wider vision of harmony and respect for all forms of existence, going beyond personal reform.

According to Advaita Vedānta, achieving deep inner peace and being free from the constraints of material attachments is another aspect of the spiritual aspect of liberation. A liberated person—often referred to as a jīvanmukta—lives in the world free from its constraints. Such a person performs without self-interest and is unaffected by success or failure, joy or misery. The liberated sage, according to T. M. P. Mahadevan, represents a condition of spiritual equanimity in which all egoism and attachment are eliminated by the knowledge of non-dual consciousness (Mahadevan, 1969, p. 131). This state of freedom is not only an abstract metaphysical condition but a lived experience characterized by tranquility, compassion, and knowledge. The ethical and spiritual aspects of emancipation in Advaita

Vedānta, in my opinion, show that the development of moral character and spiritual knowledge is inextricably linked to self-realization. Liberation is a transforming process that alters a person's connection with themselves, other people, and the cosmos; it is not merely an intellectual realization. Advaita Vedānta offers a comprehensive picture of spiritual development that combines moral and spiritual practice with intellectual understanding by emphasizing both knowledge and ethical discipline. This Advaitic viewpoint provides a significant route to inner freedom, moral responsibility, and spiritual fulfilment in a modern world frequently characterized by moral ambiguity and existential dread.

5 | CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF THE ADVAITIC CONCEPT OF MUKTI

In the modern world, the Advaitic concept of Mukti, or liberation, which is understood as the realization of the identity of Ātman and Brahman, is still very relevant. This philosophical realization, in my opinion, provides a significant answer to many of the existential and moral dilemmas that define contemporary human existence. The Advaita Vedānta notion of freedom challenges people to explore the deeper qualities of human awareness and to seek fulfillment beyond external achievements in a time of rapid technological growth, materialism, and growing psychological discomfort. A potent conceptual foundation for tackling the spiritual crises of contemporary society is provided by the notion that emancipation results from self-realization rather than from outside circumstances. The Advaitic notion of Mukti's emphasis on inner freedom and self-knowledge is one of its greatest contributions in the modern era. Freedom in contemporary nations is frequently defined in terms of social mobility, economic opportunity, or political rights. Advaita Vedānta reminds us that true freedom is essentially an internal condition founded on the realization of one's actual nature, even though these dimensions are unquestionably significant. The Upanishadic tradition holds that the realization of the self as pure consciousness surpasses all constraints imposed by attachment and ignorance. Liberation occurs when a person recognizes the ultimate reality that underpins all existence, as the Mundaka Upaniṣad implies (Radhakrishnan, 1953, p. 686). This viewpoint emphasizes the ongoing importance of self-awareness as the cornerstone of true freedom.

The modern philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan stressed the present value of Advaita Vedānta by viewing it as a philosophy capable of integrating spiritual perception with intellectual investigation. He contends that the discovery of non-duality is a profound philosophical comprehension of the unity of existence rather than just a mystical experience. According to his perspective, Advaita Vedānta invites people to see the spiritual unity that underlies all people and to transcend limited forms of identification. "The realization of the unity of the self with the universal spirit provides the basis for a deeper ethical consciousness and universal human solidarity," according to Radhakrishnan (Radhakrishnan, 1999, p. 50). This Advaitic concept of unity provides a crucial philosophical basis for fostering harmony and respect for one another in the light of current international crises and cultural diversity. Mukti's ethical implications for interpersonal relationships and social life constitute another significant aspect of its relevance in the modern era. Compassion, non-violence, and respect for the dignity of others are naturally encouraged by the Advaita Vedānta awareness that all beings are infused with the same divine consciousness. The moral ramifications of non-duality are highly relevant to contemporary debates about social fairness, environmental responsibility, and human rights. By dispelling the delusion of separateness and promoting a sense of unity with the entire cosmos, the realization of non-dual consciousness, according to T. M. P. Mahadevan, changes a person's moral perspective (Mahadevan, 1969, p. 138). According to this viewpoint, the spiritual understanding of Advaita Vedānta can aid in the creation of a more compassionate and inclusive ethical framework in modern society.

The Advaitic idea of Mukti is also applicable to modern people's existential and psychological issues. Despite material affluence, alienation, insecurity, and discontent are common characteristics of modern life. Advaita Vedānta emphasizes that ignorance of the fundamental nature of the self is the primary cause of such suffering. People can overcome the constraints of ego and have a deep sense of

contentment and serenity when they recognize the identity of the self with the absolute reality. According to S. C. Chatterjee and D. M. Datta, emancipation in Advaita Vedānta is the pinnacle of self-realization when a person realizes that all fleeting experiences are rooted in an eternal and unchanging reality (Chatterjee & Datta, 2016, p. 359). This philosophical realization provides a potent remedy for the existential fears that frequently accompany contemporary life. The Advaitic idea of Mukti is still relevant today since it combines metaphysical understanding with moral duty and spiritual health. Advaita Vedānta offers a comprehensive vision of human freedom that surpasses the constraints of solely material or individualistic viewpoints by highlighting the unity of existence and the transformational power of self-knowledge. The Advaitic ideal of self-realization urges people to develop inner consciousness, ethical sensitivity, and a sense of global connectivity in a society increasingly beset with moral ambiguity, cultural fragmentation, and ecological crises. As a result, the Advaita Vedānta's notion of Mukti continues to be both a living source of inspiration for the quest of spiritual understanding and peaceful cooperation in the contemporary world, as well as a profound philosophical philosophy.

6 | CONCLUSION

To sum up, the Advaita Vedānta interpretation of Mukti offers a profound philosophical worldview in which realizing one's actual essence leads to emancipation. In my view, Advaita Vedānta's concept of Mukti transcends the traditional idea of liberation as a post-mortem reward or a metaphysical escape from the world. Rather, it symbolizes the awakening of human awareness to the knowledge that the ultimate truth (Brahman) is the same as the individual self (Ātman). This insight reveals the innate freedom and unity of reality by eliminating the ignorance (avidyā) that gives rise to the illusion of separateness and bondage. Advaita Vedānta's philosophical study shows that emancipation is essentially a shift in awareness rather than a modification of the outside world. According to Śaṅkarācārya's methodical interpretation of the Upanishads, the realization of non-duality (advaita) results in the collapse of egoistic attachment and the emergence of a greater comprehension of the unity underlying all forms of life. In this way, Mukti is a spiritual experience that allows a person to transcend the bounds of empirical reality as well as a metaphysical insight. The Advaitic ideal of freedom can be attained in the context of daily life through knowledge, ethical discipline, and spiritual awareness, as further demonstrated by the concept of jīvanmukti, or liberation while living. The Advaitic idea of Mukti's lasting significance stems from its capacity to combine spiritual fulfilment, ethical transformation, and metaphysical contemplation into a cohesive philosophical framework. The Advaita Vedānta vision of self-realization provides a meaningful path toward inner liberation and global peace in the modern world, where people frequently suffer fragmentation, alienation, and existential ambiguity. Advaita Vedānta's philosophy, which emphasizes the union of the self with the absolute reality, continues to stimulate intellectual investigation and spiritual contemplation by offering a timeless viewpoint on the ultimate purpose and potential of human existence.

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