

Why should I study and practice advaita vedanta?

Introduction

Summary

This document analyzes the actions performed by an individual in his life cycle. The underlying goal for these actions is happiness. Do these actions meet with desired goals? What options does an individual have if these goals are not met? One of the options is to study and practice advaita vedanta.

This document is the first part of five parts of the introduction to the study of advaita vedanta

I – Why should I study and practice the advaita vedanta philosophy

II – How should I study the advaita vedanta philosophy

III - Indian schools of philosophy

IV– Vedic scriptures

V – Advaita vedanta philosophy

Relevance

It is necessary to have clear understanding of the need for the study of advaita vedanta, to have required focus, attention, and effort for the study.

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- Goal based living in context of advaita vedanta life cycle

Let us begin the first part.

References

- 1) “Introduction to vedanta philosophy” of Swami Parmarthananda

- 2) “Indian conception of values” of M. Hiriyanna
- 3) “The quest after perfection” of M. Hiriyanna

Key Definitions

Value – Value has many definitions. The definition used in this document – concepts that are important to an individual.

Goal – Objectives for a transactions

Dharma – Dharma has many definitions. The definition used in this article – regulative guidelines for artha and kama goals.

Moksa – Moksa has many definitions – The definition used in this article – acquisition of self-knowledge.

Goal Based life

- 1) We all are born, live and die. Birth and death are definitive events, and life spans between these two events. All our physical, mental, and intellectual activities take place in this span of life, called samsara in Vedic scriptures. These activities are manifested as thoughts, speech, emotions, actions, and experiences. These activities are all about interactions. There are three types of interactions.
 - a) between the living entities called subjects (individual) and the non-living entities called objects
 - b) between individuals.
 - c) within an individual – for example – deliberation on a situation, making decisions etc.The objects referenced above include all material things in the world. Thus, there are living and non-living entities interacting with each other in an individual’s life. At present there are more than seven billion individuals living in this world. The collective data about the interactions of all the lives are available to us as a source for analysis and understanding of ourselves.
- 2) Data about interactions or transactions in lives of individuals are huge. The data needs to be structured to make any sense. As per Vedic scriptures, all transactions are goals based. What is a goal? Goal is what is desired or sought by individuals. Vedic scriptures have divided these goals into four categories called Purusartha – artha (wealth), kama (pleasure), dharma (ethics), and moksha (self-knowledge). Let us now look at the categorization of transactional data based on goals.

Goal based categorization of transactional data

- 1) Artha (wealth) covers all the transactions with the goal of material acquisition. It is primarily concerned with the basic needs of everyone. What are these basic needs? First, food is required for sustaining the body. Second, clothes and healthcare are required for protection of the body against the external elements. Third, dwelling is required for security of individual and family against nature and other living entities (humans and animals). So, everyone first

seeks freedom from pains and threats. This is called duhkha-nivrtti in Sanskrit. Duhkha means all types of pain and Nivrtti means freedom.

- a) As soon as basic needs of an individual are met, the focus of artha is shifted from need to want. Individual's desire for additional material acquisitions is rationalized (disguised as need) leading to additional artha transactions. These desires keep on increasing and this process continues throughout the life.
 - b) Artha is also used as a mean to kama goal because material acquisition is necessary for fulfilling kama's desire for pleasure.
- 2) Kama (pleasure) covers all transactions with the goal of pleasure. This is called sukha-prapti in sanskrit. Sukha means enjoyment and Prapti means to acquire. All objects of pleasure and sources of entertainment, which are desired by an individual, are included in kama. Artha, in addition to providing the basic material needs, is the means to all kama goals.
- 3) There are no transactions directly related to the goal of dharma. Dharma is a complex goal.
- a) Dharma can be discussed from two perspectives: pursuing it for its relationship with artha and kama; and pursuing it for its relationship with moksha. For our purpose here, we will limit the discussion to the relation of dharma with artha and kama – like traditional ethics.
 - b) After being established in pursuing the life based on artha and kama goals, some individuals are not satisfied and have a desire for revisiting the way these transactions are conducted. What is this desire about? It is about the validation that the individual is performing these transactions in conformity with his values of good and right. Everyone has relative priority of good and right value within the set of their personal values. Further, everyone has different strengths of good and right value. Mostly, these values are formulated on family background and social environment. Without getting into details, these values typically have properties like – telling the truth, being honest, not hurting others, doing social work, giving to charities etc. Dharma as goal in this context is really a regulative principle – ensuring that artha and kama goals are performed in accordance with the good and right value of the individual.
 - c) Therefore, in addition to artha and kama goal centric transaction, there are two new types of transactions.
 - i) Transaction with artha goal regulated by dharma
 - ii) Transactions with kama goal regulated by dharma
- 4) After being established in pursuing the life based on artha and kama goals regulated by dharma, some individuals are not satisfied. This raises two questions? First question – why are the individuals not satisfied? Second question – what options do the individuals have?
- a) Why are the individuals not satisfied? Because there are three innate limitations in pursuance of artha, kama, and dharma (regulative version) goals.
 - i) The pleasure driven by the individual is always mixed with pain. The pain component is manifested as - long and hard effort for acquisition of goal, constant additional effort to maintain or sustain the result, and fear of losing the acquisition because they are all non-permanent.

- ii) Individual is mostly not satisfied with what he possesses. We all want more and more. There is no limit to our want.
- iii) Results of the goals make the individual dependent on them. The acquisitions of artha and kama goals make one dependent on external factors. This dependence leads one to less freedom and more bondage.
- iv) This dependence is called individual or human limitation.
- b) What options do the individual have? Solution for human limitations is beyond the worldly experience and knowledge, otherwise individuals would have fixed the problem and not be in this state. This leads one to search for such experience and knowledge. Here advaita vedanta offers the option of moksa goal.
 - i) What is moksa? Moksa goal is a complex subject. We will limit here to an overview as it will serve the purpose.
 - ii) The goal of artha, kama, and dharma can be attained through karma – secular and sacred actions. But The goal of moksha cannot be attained through karma. It can only be attained through knowledge.
 - iii) Moksa goal starts with the desire to alleviate the limitations of artha, kama, and dharma goals - > leads to study of vedic scriptures in the format of philosophy - > leads to the understanding (self-knowledge) of identity of individual (Jiva) and Brahman (ultimate reality).
- c) Moksa (self-knowledge) covers all transactions with the goal of understanding the identity of individual and ultimate reality. Ultimate reality has no limitations. Therefore, individual has no limitation.

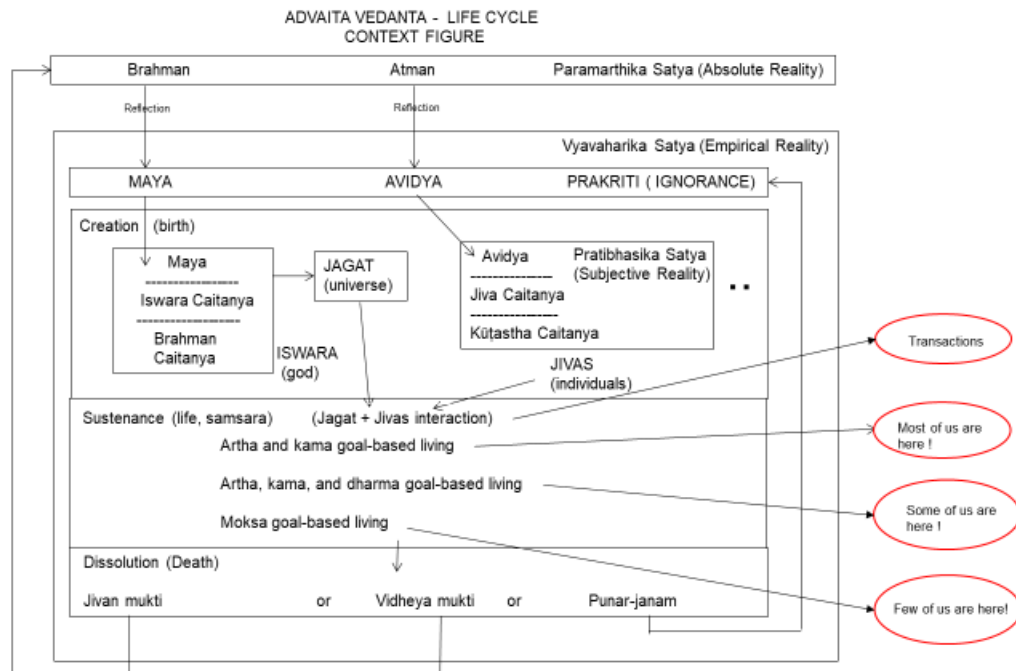
Analysis of transactional data of individual lives

1. **Most individuals** spend their life pursuing artha and kama goals. They accept the results of the goals as per their capacity and capability and are satisfied with them. They do not have a need or desire for dharma or moksa goal. *They are not required to study advaita vedanta. They have the option to study it for academic interest.*
2. **Some individuals** are not fully satisfied with their life pursuing artha and kama goals. They want to have value based artha and kama goals. This is provided by regulative principles of dharma (ethics). They are satisfied with their adjusted life pursuing regulated artha and kame. They have no further need or desire for moksa. *They can study advaita vedanta to expand the knowledge and understanding of the regulative principles of dharma. This will improve the quality of their implementation.*
3. **Few individuals** are still not satisfied with situation in their life. Their expectation of quality and quantity of happiness and contentment are not met by pursuit of artha, kama, and dharma (regulative version). They have need or desire for moksa. *They must study advaita vedanta to acquire self-knowledge – identity of individual with ultimate reality. As ultimate reality has no limitations – individuals have no limitations.*
4. The table below captures this analysis.

Goals of Life	Number of individuals	Advaita Vedanta study
Artha and kama	Most individuals	Optional
Artha, kama, and dharma	Some individuals	Helpful
Moksa	Few individuals	Necessary

Goal based living in context of Advaita Vedanta life cycle

The figure below captures the individual life cycle as per Advaita Vedanta.



There are many terms used in this context figure which have not been covered in this part of the document. They will be explained later. Take note of the four ovals identifying the transactions; artha and kama based living; artha, kama, and dharma-based living; and moksa based living. The purpose here is to provide a context for goal based living within the complete life cycle based on advaita vedanta.