



An Exposition of the Notion Self and Identity in the Philosophy of Rāmānuja: A Critical Study

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Received: 20 September 2019 / Revised: 11 March 2024 / Accepted: 24 April 2024
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Abstract

The proposed study endeavors to delve into the philosophical concepts of self and identity as elucidated by the eminent Indian philosopher Rāmānujachārya. This critical examination aims to underscore Rāmānuja's perspective on the self, surpassing the limitations inherent in both physical and mentalist accounts of human existence. The study specifically directs attention to queries surrounding self-ownership, the constancy of identity amidst change, consciousness, and its interconnection with the self. Unlike explanations that reduce the notion of self to either the body or the mind, this study seeks to explicate Rāmānuja's accounts of self and identity by recognizing that merely equating the self with the body or mind fails to address the profound sense of ownership or possession we experience. In the vast landscape of Indian philosophical thought, the self is traditionally viewed as inherently eternal, temporarily associated with the body for the purpose of navigating accumulated karma across multiple lifetimes. However, this study diverges from moralistic and eschatological discussions, concentrating instead on the metaphysical aspects articulated by Rāmānuja. Central to Rāmānuja's philosophy is the juxtaposition of *Brahman*, the ultimate reality, with *ātman*, the individual self present in all living beings. Distinctions among beings are attributed to the nature of the bodies they inhabit. The crux of the matter lies in understanding the relationship between the individual self and *Brahman*, conceptualized as a part-whole relationship. Consequently, the inquiry emerges: How does the part relate to the whole? What is the nature of the self in the context of *Brahman*? This paper undertakes a dual-level philosophical analysis of the notion self. It explores the metaphysical level, seeking to comprehend the general meaning and significance of the self. Simultaneously, it delves into the contextual and particular dimensions, unraveling the specific conceptualizations that the individual self undergoes contingent upon its situations. Further questions pertaining to self and identity come to the forefront. How does the self relate to its identity—is it pre-given or constructed? Is there an intrinsic essence to the identity of the self? Addressing these questions inevitably draws attention to the intertwined issues of caste and gender within this philosophical discourse.

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Keywords Self · Identity · Social conditioning · Part-whole relationship · Agency

Introduction

The proposed study aims to explore the concepts of self and identity in the philosophy of Rāmānujachārya. This critical and comparative study seeks to foreground, in Rāmānuja, an account of the self that overcomes the limitations of physical and mentalist perspectives on the human self. It focuses on the question of the ownership of the self and the stability of identity despite change. The study explains the notion of self by equating it with the body or mind, which does not adequately explain our sense of owning or possessing.

The focus of my paper shall not be on any moralistic or eschatological account of the self, but on the metaphysical account developed by Rāmānuja, an eleventh-century philosopher. The idea of self can be philosophically analyzed at two different conceptual levels: We can deal with the notion of self at a metaphysical level, attempting to understand the meaning and significance of this notion in general. We could also deal with the notion of self along with its contextuality and particularities, seeking to understand the specific conceptualizations that the individual self undergoes depending on its contexts and particular situations. I will try to analyze the notion of self and identity in Rāmānuja in both these senses.

Other questions that arise regarding self and identity are as follows: What kind of relationship does the self bear with its identity—pre-given or constructed by the individual self? Is there anything essential about the identity of the self? If we take up these questions, the issues of caste and gender also surface in this debate in a significant way. I seek to investigate the ways in which Rāmānuja understands the self and its relation to *Brahman*, the ultimate reality for him. I shall be investigating the concept of *Brahman* in Rāmānuja and examining the points of conflict in Rāmānuja regarding the nature of the individual self and the question of its identity with *Brahman*. The relation is understood as a part–whole relationship, with the self being the part and Brahman being the whole. Now, the question that arises is: How is the part related to the whole? How do we understand the nature of self in the light of *Brahman*?

Rāmānuja on the Notion ‘Self’

The philosophical theory of Rāmānuja is known as *Viśiṣṭādvaita*, a non-dualistic school of *Vedānta* philosophy. It espouses a non-dualism of the qualified whole, wherein *Brahman* alone exists but is characterized by multiplicity. *Viśiṣṭādvaita* can be described as qualified monism or attributive monism, representing a school of *Vedānta* Philosophy that embraces all diversity while acknowledging an underlying unity. *Viśiṣṭādvaita* considers the ultimate reality to be the three entities of matter (*acit*), individual self (*cit*), and *Īśvara*. Rāmānuja acknowledges the individual self as a part of *Brahman* and affirms its ontological reality. For the first time, Rāmānuja provides a systematic form of monotheism, positing

Brahman as the highest reality filled with multiplicity. Rāmānuja recognizes *Brahman* as an individual possesses reality that *cit* and *acit*, what perceive and what does not perceive, soul and matter, form as it were the body of *Brahman*, are in fact modes of *Brahman*. According to Rāmānuja, “*Brahman* is not only the efficient cause but also the material cause of the world. The text ‘All this has its self in That’ (*Chā.* VI. Viii. 7) shows that *Brahman* has for its body this world of sentient and insentient beings in all Its condition, I.e, both in cause and effected state” (Vireswarananda & Adidevananda, 2022a). Matter and individual self are absolutely dependent on *Brahman*. The Universal Selves are the conscious selves as well as unconscious matter. Rāmānuja maintains that the relation between the body and the self are inseparable. The inseparable unity of matter, self and *Brahman* constitute the reality.

Rāmānuja starts with the rejection of the *Advaita* theory of pure non-dualism. According to Śāṅkara, “*Brahman*, the non-differentiated pure consciousness, is the only reality, and all this manifolds is imagined in it alone and is false. The universe my dear, was but the real (*Sat*) in the beginning -only one without a second” (Vireswarananda & Adidevananda, 2022b). Against Śāṅkara, he pointed out that the Pure unity of undifferentiated consciousness which is the only “*Sat*” (existence) cannot be the source of the differences or multiplicity which are ultimately “*asat*” (non-existence); this would also mean predication of contradictory characters in the same locus. Rāmānuja recognizes three factors (*tattva-traya*), that is matter (*acit*), soul or self (*cit*), and God or *Brahman* as ultimately real. The *Brahman*, self and non-self, among them the last two that is “*cit* and *acit*” are absolutely related or dependent on *Brahman*. The relation or dependence between “matter and individual selves” with *Brahman* is variously conceived as that of the body and the soul (*Sarira* and *Sariri*), or that of substance and attributes (*Dravya* and *Guna*), or that of whole and part (*aṃsi* and *aṃsa*), subject and object (*Visayi* and *Visaya*), organism and organs (*Angi* and *Angaā*), etc. *Brahman* is the soul not only of the inorganic nature (matter) but also of organic nature (*jivas*). The individual self, or *jiva*, is intimately related to *Brahman*, who is the ground of everything. This relation between the *jiva*, or individual self, and *Brahman* (the Absolute Self, infinite Self) is not identical or non-different in an unqualified sense, as it is in Śāṅkara’s philosophy. The finite selves cannot be identical with the Absolute Self, who is infinite. This is because the Absolute Self pervades and controls the individual selves, as well as every other thing in the universe; thus, individual selves are non-different from Him. Just as a part is inseparable from the whole, an attribute or quality from the substance, or the organs from the organism, or the body from the soul that controls it, so too the existence of the individual selves is inseparable from the Absolute Self. However, as identity between two altogether different terms cannot be truly asserted, it would be a meaningless tautology to speak of identity between exactly identical terms. *Brahman*, the Absolute Self, and the *ātman*, the individual self, cannot be identical in that sense, for the Lord is the whole, and the *Jivas* are a part thereof. He is the substance or the universal soul, while the *Jivas* are modes or attributes. The asserted identity between *Brahman* and *Jiva* is, therefore, the identity of the same substance possessing different qualities or between *Ishvara* with certain qualifications and *Ishvara*

with certain other qualifications. This kind of identity is called relational identity. The nature of this relational identity will be discussed later.

According to Rāmānuja, *Brahman* never becomes the finite self; it is the whole, and the whole can never become a part. The whole cannot be reduced to the level of a part, just as a substance cannot be reduced to the level of an attribute and become an attribute. In this context, *Brahman* is considered the cause of individual selves, signifying the ultimate entirety of existence (*Sat*) or the eternal substance underlying all finite existence—both matter and self. *Brahman* exists eternally as *Brahman*, and the selves within it exist eternally as such. *Brahman* is not the cause in the sense of an immediate unconditional antecedent; the whole does not precede the parts, nor do the parts succeed the whole. *Brahman* always exists as the whole, encompassing both *cit* (self) and *acit* (matter), and it never transforms into the parts. Consequently, it is not subject to the imperfections of the parts (*Jivas*). For Rāmānuja, identity is the identity of one substance underlying two real forms. The whole genuinely possesses different parts, maintaining inherent differences. However, the same identical whole also resides in every part without undergoing modification into the parts. Therefore, individual selves eternally exist as integral parts of the whole, which is *Brahman*. Unlike in Śāṅkara's concept of absolute identity, where individual selves get dissolved after being identified with the Absolute Self, whereas in the perspective of Rāmānuja, individual selves have its identity distinct from that of the identity of Absolute Self.

The individual selves are not infinite, as they are a part of *Brahman*, which alone is infinite. The individual selves cannot be infinite; according to Rāmānuja, the individual self is infinitely small. If the individual selves were neither infinite nor infinitesimal, they would have medium dimensions like physical objects composed of parts, and then, like such objects, they would be liable to destruction. Hence, the individual selves are infinitely small in nature. The individual selves are conceived as pervasive in nature. They are pervasive in the sense that they are so subtle as to be able to penetrate into every unconscious and material substance. The *Advaita* view that *ātman* or the individual self is *akhanda* in nature and therefore not relative to any other is not accepted by Rāmānuja. According to Rāmānuja, if *ātman* is *akhanda* or indivisible in nature, then the sense of *akhanda* ascribes to it the character of indivisibility. Further, individual selves, as knower, are related to knowing as their property and, through the property of knowing, to the object known. The *Advaita* view that *Brahman*, which is Pure, non-dual intelligence, appears falsely as the triad of knower, knowing, and the known through the adjunct of *māyā* or nescience, is also not tenable. It cannot have the individual self as its substrate, for the *Jiva* or the individual self is itself the product of Nescience. Nor can Nescience have *Brahman* as its substrate, for *Brahman* is Pure, self-luminous intelligence, and any Nescience in *Brahman* is inconsistent with the nature of *Brahman* as Pure, self-shining intelligence. Therefore, according to Rāmānuja, the *Jivas* are the real knowing agents.

Rāmānuja believes that if the world and individual selves are unreal, then their experiences are also unreal. According to him, unless the reality of the individual self and the external world is affirmed, all our experiences remain meaningless. It cannot be the case that one accepts the reality of the individual selves and the

unreality of the world, and vice versa. One has to accept the reality of one in order to accept the reality of the other and vice versa. Here, the reality of one implies the reality of the other and vice versa. Rāmānuja affirms the existence of individual selves as well as the world. According to Rāmānuja, *Brahman* is personal and the creator of persons, all of whom consequently have an equality of status, not only metaphysically but also as a group. This view of Rāmānuja discards the inequalities based on caste and race because we all have the same source in us, or *Brahman* is equally in all of us. There is no division of higher and lower from the standpoint of *Brahman*. Everything in this universe is the creation of the same *Brahman*. Rāmānuja has discussed this in the form of soul-body relationship. Rāmānuja rejects the mechanical repetition of the formula “I am *Brahman* or *Aham Brahmasmi* (अहं ब्रह्मास्मि)” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad), because it does not contribute anything to the individual’s own existence, individual’s understanding of *Brahman* and individual’s relationship with the *Brahman*. In the formula “I am *Brahman*”, the “I” is subsumed by *Brahman*. Here, the emphasis goes only upon *Brahman*. In Rāmānuja’s metaphysics, emphasis is placed not only on the notion of individual selves and the Absolute Self but also on the function of the will. According to Rāmānuja, it is not just the activity that is highlighted, but also the freedom of the individual. Salvation, in his view, is not absorption into the absolute, but rather fellowship with it. Here, the individual is accorded the same status as *Brahman*, yet it is not submerged into the nature of *Brahman*. In Rāmānuja’s philosophy, the individual retains its identity while simultaneously being related to *Brahman*.

According to Śāṅkara, being is the absolute category, while Rāmānuja differs from him by emphasizing the concrete nature of being. In Śāṅkara’s philosophy, the absolute is abstract and impersonal, whereas in Rāmānuja’s perspective, the absolute contains the phenomenal world with all its categories as moments within itself. For Śāṅkara, being is absolute identity, while in Rāmānuja, being is concrete or relational identity. Both Śāṅkara and Rāmānuja attach the greatest importance to liberation for the individual self. In Śāṅkara’s view, the question of who will be liberated is vague because he does not accept the reality of individual selves. In contrast, in Rāmānuja’s philosophy, the question becomes meaningful because the individual self has its own identity that will be liberated. Śāṅkara believes that the experience of the individual self adds nothing to its development, ending with an identification with the Absolute. On the other hand, Rāmānuja sees liberation as a gain in knowledge, bliss, and being. He holds that individual experience is real, not illusory, and is a manifestation of the nature and power of the absolute *Brahman*. In Rāmānuja’s philosophy, individual experience is not lost in vagueness, as it is in Śāṅkara’s, because an individual’s own identity gives realization to the individual experience.

Rāmānuja’s philosophical exploration takes experience as its point of departure and returns to it as its ultimate foundation. Initially, this experience presents itself as indeterminate and unclear, gradually gaining clarity through analysis and synthesis as we discern its multiplicity of relations to other experiences. This clarity is achieved when the experience establishes its relationship with *Brahman*. When individuals fail to realize their identity in terms of their connection with *Brahman* and instead perceive themselves as isolated individuals, they make the mistake of

mistaken identity. This false identification, particularly with the empirical body, provides a breeding ground for the emergence of evil. Rāmānuja contends that the central aspect of all experience is consciousness—not just any consciousness, but a conscious self. Consciousness is the source of all proof, and it serves as the witness to all evidence. A crucial question arises: How can this consciousness and the elements connected to the person be conscious of themselves? Rāmānuja’s answer posits that an individual self becomes conscious of itself only when it establishes a relationship with the Absolute Self. According to Rāmānuja, the progress of knowledge moves from vaguely indeterminate experiences to increasingly determinate ones. This progression occurs as the subject-object relationship becomes more evident, leading to the emergence of additional relations and, consequently, greater determination. However, it is essential to note that even the vaguely determinate experiences at the beginning already manifest some degree of difference, as per Rāmānuja’s perspective.

Rāmānuja opposes the view of Śāṅkara that pure being, unrelated being, or pure intelligence exists. He argues that such a being is beyond the scope of knowledge and hence meaningless. Rāmānuja is opposed to Śāṅkara’s view of pure being, which he identifies with *Brahman*. According to Śāṅkara, *Brahman* is the identity of pure being, intelligence, and pure bliss and is the true self of us all. Its nature is realized in dreamless sleep. Dasgupta writes, “so long as we are in our ordinary waking state, we are identifying the self with thousands of illusory things, with all that we call “I” or “mine”; but in dreamless sleep we are absolutely without any touch of these phenomenal notions, the nature of our true state as pure bliss is partially realized” (Dasgupta, 1922). Rāmānuja dismisses the view that there is such a thing as pure being, asserting that being is dynamic and attributive. He identifies the dynamic character of being as the source of self-projection and self-integration, enabling the possibility of going out and coming in. According to Rāmānuja, the individual self is concrete, relational, and dynamic in nature, or it is essentially nothing. Its concreteness arises from its unique identity, while its relational nature stems from its connection with the Absolute Self. In contrast to Śāṅkara’s concept of pure consciousness, Rāmānuja views the individual self as a conscious subject. So, what does Rāmānuja mean by this conscious subject? He refers to it as qualified non-dualism or attributive non-dualism. In this perspective, *Brahman* is being, and this being is attributed to *Brahman*’s power of activity, specifically thought. According to Rāmānuja, existence implies relatedness, and reality is synonymous with activity. This continuous activity establishes increasingly greater relations, making it capable of being publicly experienced. According to him, “the universe of *chit* and *achit* lives, moves and has its being in *Brahman* and derives its form and function from its omni-penetrativeness. Just as the self pervades the body, *Brahman* vivifies the universe as the life of its life. Though *Brahman* is in space, it is not space or specialized, or limited to particular locality” (Srinivasachari, 1943) *Brahman* is related to each and every being of this universe irrespective of living and non-living.

According to Rāmānuja, “the soul is a part of Brahman, for the scriptures declare both difference and non-difference between them. Though it is a part of Brahman, yet the latter is not of the same nature as the soul, but is always free from imperfections and possessed of auspicious qualities. The soul is a part in the sense that light

is a part of the orb, of the body that of an embodied being” (Vireswarananda & Adidevananda, 2022c). A soul is a part of *Brahman*, qualified by it, for it is the body of *Brahman*. An attribute is a part of a qualified substance. Therefore, a soul, being an attribute of *Brahman*, is a part of it. A material thing, like a soul, is also a part of *Brahman*; it is the body of *Brahman*. Just as light, both different and non-different, forms a luminous body of which it is a part, matter and soul are both different and non-different from *Brahman*. The common characteristics of the individual self, as *Ishvara*, include self-consciousness, sentience, self-hood, and monadic nature. Like Śāṅkara, Rāmānuja does not reduce the nature of the self to the level of the body. He does not identify the self with the body, mind, or consciousness. According to him, the individual self is different from the body, as in perception. It is also distinct from vital breath and consciousness. The self is an eternal point of spiritual light, beyond creation and destruction. According to Rāmānuja, the self is conceived as a real knower, agent, and enjoyer. Consciousness is the nature and attribute of the self. The individual self is only a part or mode of *Brahman*. Rāmānuja proposes a part-and-whole relational identity for the nature of self. The self is the nature of knowledge, and knowledge is an essential and inseparable attribute of it. Objects are known by the self through its knowledge, and knowledge exists for the self. Knowledge is its very essence, belonging to the self even in deep sleep and liberation. When the self is in bondage, it means that its knowledge is obstructed by its *karma*. In liberation, the self becomes all-encompassing as all *karmanas* are destroyed. What is left after the destruction of all *karma* is the essential nature common to all individual selves.

According to Rāmānuja, finite self is nothing but knowing “I”. He says, “as is proved by perception, he writes, and as also results from reasoning and tradition, and from its connection with ignorance, the self presents itself as a knowing “I”” (Vireswarananda & Adidevananda, 2022d). Finite self is the essential unity of the Absolute Self or *Brahman* and is unrealized apart from him. It is called one of the aspect of *Brahman*. Just as the created world is an aspect of *Brahman*, so likewise is finite self-hood. He says, “The relation between the finite self and *Brahman* may be compared to the light radiating from a luminous body” (Vireswarananda & Adidevananda, 2022e). It means the finite self noting apart from *Brahman* and on the other hand the finite self is not submerged or swallowed or lost by the Absolute Self. In Rāmānuja the finite self retain its identity and at the same time it is related to the Absolute Self. In Śāṅkara, an individual’s identity is lost as one submerged in the identity of the *Brahman* but in Rāmānuja one retain one’s individual identity even after establishment of relation with *Brahman*. The finite self is in constant starving to unite in its fragment of insights and intuitions into a whole. What exactly the nature of the relation that Rāmānuja holds exist between the Absolute Self and the finite self? The relation is the relation of identity. It can be inferred that Rāmānuja subscribe to the identity of cause and effect in the sense of their unbroken continuity, rejecting *anu* view such as atomism which would separate them or abstractionism, which would regard one apart from other. To him the cause is not temporarily prior to its effect as well as sequence. The cause is not the contradiction of the effect but is coordinated and continuous with it. Thus there is no break between the infinite self and the finite self to which it give rise. The process of self-manifestation

which characterizes *Brahman* is one that implies unity, continuity and agency. The infinite self is not to be confused with the finite self. The finite self comes into being through an act of will by which the absolute finite itself. “The relation of the Absolute Self to the finite self is as the relation of the self and body” (Adidevananda, 1946). It explains that the individual self is the body of the Absolute Self.

The finite self, in relation to the Absolute Self, embodies the notion of part and whole. In Śāṃkara’s perspective, the part dissolves into the whole, transcending individual existence to become one with the entirety. There exists no distinct part; only the existence of the whole prevails. On the contrary, in Rāmānuja’s philosophy, the finite self is considered an aspect or part of the absolute. However, this relationship should not be construed in a spatial sense, as the self is beyond spatial separation or division, existing as a spiritual unity. The Absolute Self, too, is not a quantitative infinite extended in space. The finite self cannot be likened to an image of the absolute, such as the reflection of the moon in water. A more fitting analogy is the radiation of light from a luminous body. The rays, while inseparable from their source, simultaneously maintain a distinctiveness. In this context, the Absolute Self can be likened to the power, and the individual self is the entity in which this power inherently resides. In Rāmānuja’s word, “as the light of a fire which abides in one place only spread all around, thus this whole world is the power (*Śakti*) of the highest *Brahman*” (Sri Rāmānuja, 1970a). But that in which the power inheres differs from the source of that power. For example, the finite self cannot create the world, whereas the absolute can. Question: If all individual selves are equally aspects of *Brahman*, all equally actuated by the Absolute Self, and all alike as knowing subjects, how is it that among these selves there are differences in quality, with some leading noble lives while others do not? Rāmānuja answers is that: “although all souls are essentially of the same nature in so far as they are parts of *Brahman*, knowing subjects, and so on, the permissions and exclusions referred to are possible for the reason that each individual soul is joined to some particular body, pure or impure, whether of a *Brāhmana* or *Kshatriya* or *Vaishya* or *Sudra* and so on. As in the case of fire and so on. All fire is of the same kind, and yet one willingly fetches fire from the house of a *Brāhmana*, while one shuns fire from a place where dead bodies are burnt. And from a *Brāhmana* one accepts food without any objection, while one refuses food from a low person” (Sri Rāmānuja, 1970b). It is clear that, according to Rāmānuja, the differences between selves are ascribable to the differences between the bodies to which they are attached. The identity of the self being attached to a particular body gives rise to the differences between the selves.

According to Rāmānuja, the absolute is the fullness of being, and the self through which it expresses itself is not just a duplication of others, but each one is a unique individuality. This individuality is not passive or inert, as in Śāṃkara’s philosophy, but active, representing an activity of *Brahman*. Through this activity, the universal becomes personal, and the absolute becomes a moral governor. In this way, the self-activity of spirit grows into the self-consciousness of personality. Rāmānuja believes that no absolutism is morally tenable if it denies the freedom of the finite self to act. He rejects such absolutism and affirms the freedom and responsibility of the finite self. Rāmānuja unequivocally asserts the freedom of the self. He says, “it (the individual self) is free; for if it were dependent on the highest self, the whole body

of scriptural injunctions and prohibitions would be unmeaning. For commandments can be addressed to such agents only as are capable of entering on action or refraining from action, according to their own thought and will” (Sri Rāmānuja, 1970c). This assertion of free will raises the question, what is the relation between the activity of the finite self and the Absolute Self? Rāmānuja’s answer is that, the finite self is capable of freely entering upon a course of action, the Absolute Self assists him in carrying it out. He writes, “the inwardly ruling highest self promotes action in so far as it regards in the case of any action the volitional effort made by the individual soul, and then aids that effort by granting its favor or permission (*anumati*). An action is not possible without permission on the part of the highest self. In this way (i.e. since the action is primarily depend on the volitional effort of the soul) injunctions and prohibitions are not devoid of meaning” (Sri Rāmānuja, 1970c). Thus all the activity of the individual self is a joint activity. The existence of highest self is always there in the performance of an action by finite self. Rāmānuja illustrate it by an example, “the case is analogous to that of property of which two men are joint owners. If one of these wishes to transfer that property to a third person he cannot do so without the permission of his partner, but that permission is given after all his own doing and hence the fruit of action properly belongs to him only” (Sri Rāmānuja, 1970d). Here, one can say that the individual self is free in so far as it can take independent action but the process of carrying such action involves both the finite self and the Absolute Self.

The individual self derives its substantiality from *Brahman* as the *ādhāra*, depending on His redemptive will as the ‘*niyantā*’, and existing as a means for the satisfaction of the ‘*sesi*’. *Brahman*, as the source, substance, and satisfaction of the finite self, is called its ‘*saririn*’. ‘*Sarira*’ connotes the ‘*Saririn*’, and the *jiva* also connotes *Brahman*, its ‘*Saririn*’. There is a plurality of *jiva*, each having its own distinct character and identity, although all *jivas* are alike insofar as they have intelligence as their essential nature. The *Advaitin* concede phenomenal reality to the finite self on the empirical plane but maintain that it is only an illusory appearance superimposed on the absolute and is ultimately sublated by *Jñāna*. They fail to explain how *Brahman* came to be clouded by *avidyā*. Furthermore, they are unable to define the nature of *mukti* and show why selves ridden by *avidyā* should continue to exist when *avidyā* has been destroyed by the *Jñāna* of any one single self. According to Rāmānuja, there are three classes of *jivas*: eternal (*nitya*), those who enjoy bliss and are free from *karma* and *prakṛti*; the freed (*mukta*), those who achieve liberation through their wisdom, virtue, and devotion; the bound (*baddha*), those who wander in *Samṣāra* owing to their ignorance and selfishness. The selves in *Samṣāra* are grouped into those desirous of enjoyment and those desirous of deliverance. Until the soul attains release, it has to be reborn to experience the fruits of *karma*, which can be exhausted by *bhoga* or enjoyment attended with Divine Grace granted through devotion and self-resignation.

According to Rāmānuja, liberation is achieved by the individual selves only when one destroys ignorance and establishes a relationship with *Brahman*. Unlike *Samṣāra*’s unqualified Monism, which envisions the highest good in a complete denial of any separate self, attaining self-realization in total self-effacement, leaving nothing but *Brahman* as the only self-shining reality, Rāmānuja upholds that

the highest satisfaction of the self lies in self-purification and self-surrender. He is a theist and believes in the highest good for the devotee to be a state of freedom from ignorance and bondage. In this view, the individual self is like *Brahman* but not merged into *Brahman*. The liberated individual, having pure consciousness untainted by any imperfection, becomes similar to *Brahman*. According to Rāmānuja, *Brahman* is not *nirguna* (unqualified), with matter and spirit being considered as eternal attributes or parts. The specific kind of relation that Rāmānuja envisions in terms of identity and difference seems logically perplexing. Inseparability of existence is a general relation that can be formulated in various ways. In some instances, Rāmānuja acknowledges the relation as one of identity-in-difference of a specific kind, which poses challenges for logical affiliation. At other times, he resorts to the analogy of a king and his subjects to explain the relationship. In this analogy, the king, despite having a body, remains unaffected by the pleasure and pains experienced by the subjects due to their obedience or disobedience to the ruler's laws. However, these analogies are imperfect and fall short in providing a comprehensive logical explanation. These analogies serve to highlight the difficulty in understanding every aspect of the relation between God and the world of matter and spirit based on ordinary experience. Rāmānuja emphasizes the inadequacy of inferences regarding God and places great importance on the authority of scriptures. The unique relation between God and spirits, directly known in religious experience and testified by those who have realized God, is challenging to find parallels for in ordinary experience.

Change, Identity and the Notion of Self

Rāmānuja never speaks of the world of matter and spirit as the manifestation of *Brahman*. According to him, the world of matter and spirit is the eternal and necessary parts of *Brahman*. The relation between matter, spirit and *Brahman*, according to him, is called the inseparability of existence (*aprathaksiddi*), and the Reality, as "*Brahman*, soul, and non-soul," is "*aprathaksiddi*" which has no separate existence. Experience is notoriously flux in nature; experience itself would be impossible without some element of identity in it. Change and permanence go hand in hand. The notion of identity and change are opposite to one another. If the world is flux in nature, then how can one identify oneself as well as other things in the world which is flux in nature? There should be something constant in the flux world that gives rise to the notion of identity. In the transient world that Rāmānuja is concerned with, the kind of identity is relational identity or concrete identity. The word relation literally means bringing together. What do we bring together? There should be multiple items if we are to speak meaningfully of relation. Rāmānuja believes that the world present to us is multiple in nature. The multiple items of the world, the identity that they bear, are the relational identity. This relation is the relation with the source that is *Brahman*. It is at this point that Rāmānuja introduces the theory of attributes. The theory is designed to preserve the identity of multiple beings while emphasizing their changing states.

Rāmānuja holds the view that Reality, if not abstract as in Śāṅkara, must be real in nature. This reality, according to Rāmānuja, is not singular but multiple and relational in nature. He vehemently opposes and criticizes the *Advaitic* pure identity, which is non-relational. Rāmānuja argues that Reality cannot be a pure identity but must be a “concrete individual,” existing only through the different conscious selves (*cit*) and non-conscious objects (*acit*). *Cit* and *acit* are inseparably related to *Brahman*. If *Brahman* is considered the substance, the world of selves and objects constitute its attributes or modes. In this framework, the relationship between substantive *Brahman* and attributive self and non-self is one of identity. This identity is relational in nature and can be described as relational identity. This relational identity operates within the realm of multiplicity and duality of beings in the universe. To Rāmānuja, identity is an inner, inseparable, vital, and organic relation. Such a relation exists between substance and its attributes, body and soul, part and whole, one substance and another substance, and also between the individual self (*ātman*) and the higher self (*Brahman*).

Rāmānuja, as a *Vedāntic* philosopher, initiates his exploration with *Brahman* as the concretely given, wherein the world of selves and non-conscious matter is equally inherent within *Brahman*. The fundamental question he confronts is: What is the relation between *Brahman*, *cit*, and *acit*? His proposition posits a substantive–attributive relation or a part-and-whole connection. From the absolute standpoint, there is no duality; however, within *Brahman*, a dualistic perspective emerges. The identity existing within the duality of the Absolute Self and the individual self is one of relational identity. Rāmānuja characterizes the Absolute as relational because his conception defines it as a concrete individual. If the ultimate reality is a concrete individual, it does not transcend relational understanding. The relation between *Brahman* and *cit*, on one hand, and *Brahman* and *acit*, on the other, is an inseparable identity relation. It is an inner, inseparable, vital, and organic connection that exists between substance and its attributes, or part and whole. Rāmānuja’s critique contends that the pure identity advocated by *Advaitins* becomes a pure nothing, as the very discussion about identity relies on the concept of difference. From the worldly, multiplicative perspective, Rāmānuja acknowledges differences, but from the absolute standpoint, he denies any distinction.

According to Rāmānuja, knowledge is relative when it has not reached its fullest development and concreteness. Similarly, knowledge is absolute when it attains the concreteness of *Brahman*. Therefore, knowledge of a particular aspect of reality is relative if it is not perceived in its totality. For absolute knowledge to emerge, all the relations implied by knowledge must be seen within a completely unified system. Rāmānuja asserts that a grandiose unity in *Brahman* represents truth. Presentations of diversity in isolation are imperfect presentations of truth, but they are not false, as in the case of *Advaita*. This view of truth as a grandiose unity has profound implications for Rāmānuja’s metaphysics and, specifically, for epistemology. Rāmānuja’s epistemology holds true for absolute consciousness as well. This is because his categories of knowledge, understood as attributive knowledge, are applicable not only to the individual self but also to *Brahman*. By its very nature, knowledge is relational. Our knowledge, necessarily relational, must develop a complete system within itself; otherwise, it is limited and cannot be considered truth. Therefore, metaphysics

cannot be content with a network of knowledge spread out in its many relational aspects, apprehending the parts in a synthesis of the whole. Since knowledge establishes a network of relations and synthesizes the parts of the whole, metaphysics is not immune to relations. Metaphysics also constructs a relational scheme encompassing all forms of knowledge and tends to transcend division and partial presentations in complete unity. Thus, the interaction between metaphysics and epistemology is mutual. Furthermore, in Rāmānuja's philosophy, being is consciousness; thus, the metaphysical theory cannot be dissonant from the epistemological theory. The epistemology must present the complete development of knowledge in a unified system; it must not be satisfied with the presentation of partial aspects of reality. Therefore, all knowledge must possess concreteness and definiteness because definiteness is strictly the characteristic mark or differentia of knowledge. There cannot be inchoate knowledge. If it ever lacks its differentia, it ceases to be knowledge, remaining as simple apprehension. One can clearly perceive the difference here between Śāṅkara and Rāmānuja: for *Advaita*, truth is not a synthesis of all partial truths but the complete denial of them. This is not the case for Rāmānuja. The truth, according to him, is the definite absolute with all its multifarious relations that are harmoniously synthesized within it.

As such, there can be no complete division eternally obtaining within truth; hence, if anybody denies the synthetic character of all presentations, it must also make all knowledge impossible. Precisely at this stage, Rāmānuja clinches the issue of relation as a necessity for any knowledge, as opposed to *Advaita*, to whom the real can never be an object of knowledge. For Rāmānuja, on the contrary, there cannot be knowledge without a reference to the real. Our knowledge is always of being, even as being is known to be a concrete being only through knowledge. In virtue of its concreteness, its tendency is to reveal itself in its complete nature; therefore, every knowledge expresses its own object. Therefore, every knowledge has a reference to an object; object-less knowledge, in the sense of being free from its object, is an illusion. Relations constitute the warp and woof of a cognitive act. In short, knowledge is essentially relational consciousness, and this relational consciousness cannot be totally false. All this goes to indicate the importance given by Rāmānuja to subject the *Advaitin's* critique of relation to a reverse critique and thus to establish the truth that relation to a reverse occupies a central place in his metaphysics.

A relation implies that two terms, once separate, are now bound together. Relation acts as the cementing bond between these terms, and its nature lies in the force it exerts in binding realities. It contributes to the unity of realities in its presence or to diversity in its absence. Rāmānuja argues that neither unity nor diversity alone captures the essence of a relation; instead, the nature of the real is constituted by the combination of both. Therefore, he believes that the denial of relations would ultimately reduce all things to nullity. Even the ineffable reality, according to him, can be apprehended if not fully comprehended, through its attributes. Thus, determination through relations forms the structure of reality. An existent without determination, he argues, is a fiction. Therefore, the negation of determinations leads to the negation of reality itself. Furthermore, Rāmānuja contends that relation, whether internal or external, is integral to the terms involved. Such an integral relation results from an internal change in the nature of the terms. He believes that the denial

of relations involves self-contradiction because such denial is possible only through relational thought.

There is no thought that operates outside the scheme of relations. It asserts that the universe, with its subjective and objective aspects, is the result of a self-differentiation of the absolute. Both aspects serve as members of a relational system. The consistent (*cit*) and the inconsistent (*acit*) are finite modes of the Absolute and have no independent existence apart from that of the Absolute *Brahman*. They are internally related to *Brahman*. It is at this point that Rāmānuja claims *Advaitin's* logic has gone astray. According to Rāmānuja, since the relation of the modes of *cit* and *acit* with *Brahman* is internal, not external, it will not lead to regress ad-infinitum. Thus, Rāmānuja attributes to the supreme reality would be like the internal unity of the inanimate and animate entities within the supreme reality itself. The supreme is thought of as having an inward dispersion, a self-differentiation, within itself by an internal necessity; the internal necessity, because it follows from its own will, does not suggest any sense of unfulfilled purposes within the absolute. This lest one should think of pure spontaneity as determined by external goals.

According to Rāmānuja, *Brahman* is the sole reality, and there is nothing else outside or independent of it. *Brahman* is devoid of two kinds of external distinctions: the distinctions between two unlike entities (*Vijātiya-bheda*) and between two like entities (*Sajātiya-bheda*). While the former asserts both unity and the absolute sovereignty of *Brahman*, negating any type of dualism, the latter asserts the uniqueness of *Brahman* and negates any type of metaphysical pluralism and religious polytheism. In contradistinction to Śāṅkara, Rāmānuja admits an internal distinction (*Svāgata-bheda*) within *Brahman*. Within *Brahman*, there are different conscious and unconscious substances that can be mutually distinguished and distinguished from *Brahman*. This internal relation is both natural and eternal. Rāmānuja's qualified monism provides a theistic interpretation of the philosophy of *jīva*, the world, and *Brahman*. According to Rāmānuja, *Brahman* or God exhibits internal distinction (*Svāgata-Bheda*) between the conscious aspect (*cit*) and the unconscious aspect or matter (*acit*). Therefore, Rāmānuja never advocates for the identification of knowledge with the self. The self is not pure consciousness but rather the eternal substratum of consciousness. Rāmānuja's conception of the difference between *jīva* and *Brahman* is grounded in this view. Individual selves are real spiritual substances pervaded by *Brahman*, forming His body. These atomic *jīva*/selves do not merge into *Brahman* in liberation; instead, they become similar to *Brahman*. Knowledge not only belongs to the subject but also points to an object that enjoys real existence outside the subject. This view, granting external to the object of knowledge, is similar to Śāṅkara's, especially when considered from the empirical standpoint. However, from the transcendental standpoint, Śāṅkara would never allow any kind of duality between subject and object.

Rāmānuja conceives space (*ākāśa*) as an evolute of *prakṛti*, the principle of matter from which the world evolves, and time (*kāla*) as an unconscious substance (*acit*). *Kāla* is the form of all existence and is perceivable. It is evident that this view of space and time has no direct link or reference to Śāṅkara's perspective on them as empirically real and transcendently nonexistent. Rāmānuja dismisses the view that *Brahman* is beyond space and time. If *Brahman* exists, it has to be within

the realm of space and time. Existence itself implies space and time. Unlike man, *Brahman* has always existed, and there was never a time when it did not exist, nor a place where *Brahman* was absent. This means *Brahman* is coexistent with space and coeval with time, and it is limited by neither. In Rāmānuja's view, time and space are not finite, although in human reckoning, space is divided into points just as time is divided into moments. Space and time are finite in the world, but infinite space and time are not limited by finite things. It is true that the world can be viewed in terms of space and time series, but it is also true that the self determines this series, for space and time constructs are the work of the mind. In themselves, neither space nor time yield any meaning, but they become meaningful only in terms of the overall purpose whose goal is soul-making. For Rāmānuja, space and time are both ontological and phenomenal. They are ontological reality in the sense that they coexist with *Brahman*, and they are phenomenal in the sense that they are experienced only in the world of change and becoming.

All determinations, limitations, and differences are deep within the heart of *Brahman*. They are also not left unorganized, but are harmoniously coordinated. Furthermore, the differences accommodated and harmoniously coordinated in this unifying principle do not vanish at any time. It is not the case that the differences within reality are entertained only for a while and then relegated to oblivion as of no ultimate significance. Rather, they are coeval and co-eternal with the unity of reality, even though we may say that they are subject to change from a subtle to a gross state in the process of evolution and from the gross to the subtle state in the process of involution. Rāmānuja's Absolute, then, is a concrete individual. If we ever speak of it in terms of identity at all, it is an identity in the sense of unity, achieved in and through difference; it is an identity impregnated with differences. Thus, a relation of difference is the pivot on which his philosophy revolves. Pure identity, or bare being, of *Brahman* without any differentiation, is a metaphysical fiction; it has no adequacy in perceptual experience, which by its nature is relational. If we have referred here to perception, it is because it is the basis of all other forms of knowledge. We could as well say that all knowledge involves discrimination, and it is impossible to know an undifferentiated object; all knowledge is in and through difference. Likewise, all unity is in and through, and because of, diversity that makes a pure identity into pure nothing. An undifferentiated reality cannot even be proved to exist because all proofs are based on the assumption that *Brahman* is of some qualified character. There cannot be proof of an undifferentiated substance in our experience. Neither *śabda* nor perception nor inference can prove the existence of an unqualified substance. In short, while speaking negatively, there is no proof anywhere of a substance devoid of all difference. Speaking positively, the only real revealed by the means of knowledge is one whole characterized by difference.

In virtue of the establishment of the relational character of all knowledge, Rāmānuja is in a position to argue that *Brahman*, as pure thought, is false. On the contrary, *Brahman*, the supreme being, may be conceived as self or person, possessed of various qualities because it is, as a concrete reality, characterized by differences. Everything experienced is found to display differences within itself; therefore, all proof cannot but rest on experience. There cannot be pure thinking but only thinking qualified by thought. Therefore, *Brahman* cannot be either a quality-less

being or pure thinking. *Brahman* ought to be a self characterized by thought as well as by several other attributes. It is for the same reason that *Brahman* cannot be regarded as pure unity; it ought rather to be a unity that includes within itself differences. A concrete reality cannot but be a unity of a plurality of aspects and modes, therefore a unity and diversity in one. Precisely because Rāmānuja makes his philosophy a philosophy of relations, he safeguards both one and many, true to the spirit of a healthy realist, without denying the many for the sake of affirming the one and also without denying the one for the sake of affirming the many.

The fuller implications of the justification come to him from his conception of *Brahman* as the living reality with a creative urge. While the *Advaitin* would be averse to speak of any synthesis in *Brahman*, Rāmānuja has no hesitation to speak of *Brahman* as a synthesis that does not deny differentiation. Rather, *Brahman* expresses itself through its differentiation only. *Brahman* is a totality without negating its parts; it is a substance without negating its attributes; it is a ground without negating its consequent; it is an integrity without negating all that makes for its integral-ness. Within its concrete being, all the finite exists as though the latter are the moments of its own existence. Moreover, the finite is not a mere embellishment to the Infinite. Through them, the latter transcends its own abstract character. Thus, to Rāmānuja, reality is a complex whole that includes both unity and diversity, the oneness, and the many-ness, without destroying its own uniqueness. The diversity of many-ness constitutes the modes of *Brahman's* all-inclusive reality. The modes are different from *Brahman*, yet they do not create any division within the integrity of its being. *Brahman* is said to realize its synthetic character through the modes. The latter, on their part, do not have distinctive existence of their own; they rather make for the 'adjectives' or modes of the former, thus vouching for the fact that they cannot be understood without reference to *Brahman*, their substance.

The mutuality between the substance and the modes is complete without any contradiction between unity and plurality. Both are safeguarded by the *aprathaksiddhi* relation. Rāmānuja's rejection of an absolutist principle of bare identity and the affirmation of a living principle of differentiation at the very heart of identity are distinct, yet not contradictory, and they can be reconciled in a synthetic unity. It may be of some interest for us here to note that the acceptance or rejection of the concept of difference introduces not only different approaches to reality but also different modes of thinking. The principal law of thinking for the *Advaitin* is the law of identity, which, in its strict application, would read as "being is being." In its contradictory aspect, now, being and non-being are mutually exclusive. Since *Brahman* alone is real, everything that is thought to be real must be false or non-being. Therefore, the being that is asserted is itself without any other being within or without. Rāmānuja, on the contrary, would have nothing against a principal law of thinking as identity, but it is not a bare identity. It is an identity that does not cancel within itself distinctions. It is not the contradiction of being and non-being that Rāmānuja is interested in; it is rather the unity of being in which the oppositions or distinctions are assimilated. He would admit within the dialectics of thought the overcoming of thesis and antithesis in an organic unity, yet not as Hegel would think. Rāmānuja thinks that it is the tendency of thought to move from the abstract to the concrete; therefore, thought is to make the bare indeterminate cognition into the determinate

and concrete. Rāmānuja assigns thought the task of building up a concrete world of knowledge, in which all the parts are unified in a system. In asserting the principal law of thought as unity (not so much identity), while he is different from the *Advaitin*, he is also different from Hegel insofar as he refuses to recognize contradiction as a law of thought, so very vital to Hegelian dialectics. Rāmānuja would contend that thought thinks in distinctions, and not in contradictions. The necessity of thought is to build up a unity of the system, and in that system, parts are seen in the whole, both in their identity and distinctions. Therefore, when we perceive the whole, we perceive a synthesized identity of existence; therefore, it is not an abstract but concrete identity.

Critical Remarks and Conclusion

Rāmānuja upholds the view that reality is relational in nature, constituting the relationship between the finite self, matter, and the infinite Self. It is explained that the individual self and matter are the body of the infinite Self. The relation between the individual self and the Absolute Self is a part-and-whole relationship. Here, the individual self is not lost in the Absolute Self, as is the case in the philosophy of Śāṅkara. In this framework, reality consists of a plurality of selves, and these selves form a system by which all their experiences are to be judged. Rāmānuja regards the individual self and matter as two independent realities, and both are related or comprehended in *Brahman* or the Absolute Self. He also believes that the purification of mind and body through concentration on *Brahman* serves as a means of final release or *Moksha*. According to Rāmānuja, all knowledge involves relation, in contrast to Śāṅkara's non-relational knowledge. The world can only be understood in relation to *Brahman*. What he accomplishes here is an attempt to preserve the identity of the Absolute Self while simultaneously doing justice to the phenomena of change and the identity of the individual self. According to Rāmānuja, the multiplicity of individual selves is real and relational to *Brahman*. He posits that all finite knowledge involves a passage from indeterminate to determinate. He does not dismiss knowledge related to individual selves, believing that the starting point of our knowledge is our sense experience. Rāmānuja holds that the self accounts for the unity of knowledge and ascribes causal agency to the self. The finite selves are in some way comprehended within the supreme self but are not lost in it, retaining their freedom and autonomy. Each individual being in this world is unique in itself, and it is by virtue of the infinite self that these selves must not be ruled out of existence or deemed unreal.

Rāmānuja accepts the existence of individual selves, and the identity that individuals undergo throughout their lives is not consigned to the realm of the unreal. The identity of individual selves is real, affording freedom to progress and blossom in a more developed form. There is freedom, possibility, and responsibility within it, encompassing change, duality, multiplicity, and relation in the domain of individual selves in Rāmānuja. The individual self is not devoid of its own identity, as it is in Śāṅkara's philosophy. An individual self maintains its unique identity while simultaneously maintaining an identity with the Absolute Self. One could say that there

are two notions of identity in the domain of individual selves. One kind of identity allows individuals to retain their uniqueness and distinguish themselves from others. This identity is not shareable and pertains only to the individual. Another kind of identity involves an inseparable connection with the Absolute Self, which is shareable. All individual selves maintain an inseparable relational identity with the Absolute Self. From the perspective of the Absolute Self, all individual selves are equal, while from the viewpoint of the individual selves, they are unique and unequal.

Rāmānuja explains the relationship between the individual self and the Absolute Self by the relationship of identity-in and through and because of difference. Identity-in and through difference explains the Whole is composed of distinguishable parts, although as a Whole, it differs from its parts. Simultaneously, the Whole is present in every part without ceasing to be one. Rāmānuja contends that the infinite Self is one and the ground of many. He manages to balance between the one and the many by placing the relationship in a special category, namely, the category of inseparability or *aprathaksiddi*. When it comes to the actions of the individual self, it aims to align with the will of Brahman. This suggests an apparent independence and capacity for free will. This autonomy is actually nested within the will of the Absolute Self. According to Rāmānuja, the individual selves and the material world constitute the body of Brahman. He attributes Brahman with a body comprised of individual selves and material entities, where all changes in the world, as well as the world itself, have Brahman's body as their efficient cause. Despite the absolute unity of *Brahman*, Rāmānuja introduces the plurality of independent selves in the form of a Parts and Whole relationship.

Rāmānuja addresses the problem of liberation differently than Śāṅkara. In Rāmānuja's framework, the question of who will be liberated is resolved by affirming the existence of the individual self destined for liberation or *Moksha*. He acknowledges the reality of individual selves, thus grounding the entire system of judgment based on right and wrong, good and bad, justice and injustice in his philosophy. The confusion arises in considering Śāṅkara's belief in liberation despite not accepting the reality of individual selves. If an individual self is not deemed real, the actions it performs cannot be considered real. Consequently, how can the results of these unreal actions lead to the world of reality or liberation in the philosophy of Śāṅkara? How can one realize the nature of reality through an unreal individual self in the philosophy of Śāṅkara? Whereas In Rāmānuja's philosophy, the self learns, examines itself, and continually improves, affirming the reality of the identity of the individual self, its actions, and the resulting rewards and punishments within the core of the Absolute Self. Rāmānuja does not term the engaged self as an illusion or appearance due to its involvement in day-to-day life, unlike in Śāṅkara's philosophy. He considers individual selves as real and existent, each possessing its own identity. It cannot be the case that one accepts the reality of the individual self without acknowledging the reality of the world in which these individual selves exist. The existence of the reality of individual selves implies the reality of the world, and vice versa. Rāmānuja accepts the theory called "*Brahman Parināmavāda*," signifying that the effect is the real transformation of the cause, not an unreal appearance, as asserted by Śāṅkara. A philosophically significant aspect of Rāmānuja's philosophy is that individual selves have their own identity while simultaneously

being related to the Absolute Self. Individual selves are not lost in the Absolute Self; they maintain their own identity while also sustaining a relational identity with the Absolute Self. The Absolute Self does not precede the individual selves, and neither do the individual selves succeed the Absolute Self. In another sense, in Rāmānuja's philosophy, reality is considered to be the whole, of which individual selves and the world are integral parts. The real identity of individual selves lies in realizing or establishing a relation with the Absolute Self, *Brahman*, and maintaining that relation throughout life.

Based on my analysis, I have concluded that concerning the question of identity, there exists a robust notion of identity in Rāmānuja's thought, unlike in Śāṅkara's philosophy. This distinction arises from Śāṅkara's denial of the reality of individual selves, while Rāmānuja accepts their existence. Establishing a robust notion of identity becomes challenging without acknowledging the reality of individual selves, a stance taken by Rāmānuja due to his acceptance of both the reality of the world and individual selves. In contrast, Śāṅkara views the individual self as illusory, considering only the Absolute Self as real. Śāṅkara introduces two levels of truth—*Pāramārthika sattā* or transcendental truth and *Vyavahārika sattā* or empirical truth. However, the gap between these truths is insurmountable in his philosophy. This lack of bridgeability in Śāṅkara's framework implies a rigidity that precludes openness to change, perfectibility, and growth, elements that find space in Rāmānuja's philosophy. I would like to address the concerns raised by J. N. Mohanty in his work "Classical Indian Philosophy: An Introductory Text," cautioning against grounding modern equality in *Vedānta* metaphysics. Mohanty argues that legal, political and economic justice requires equality among differences rather than identity (Mohanty, 2000). This write-up seeks to offer a different viewpoint on the connection between identity and equality within Rāmānuja's philosophy, proposing that they don't have to be regarded as conflicting concepts. Rāmānuja's philosophy of identity-in-difference embraces the core principles of equality amidst diversity.

Funding I hereby declare that the paper does not have any funding.

Declarations

Conflict of interest I hereby declare that the paper does not have any conflicting of interests or hold any competing interest with any agency or individual.

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