

WHO AM I?: RAMANA MAHARISHI'S PHILOSOPHY OF SELF

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Abstract:

Philosophical approaches to human self hopes to open up advanced platforms of research by increasing the points of interdisciplinary collaborations among the disciplines within Cognitive Science. The problem of self has played a central role in the philosophical discussions encountered by both Western and Indian philosophical traditions. Ramana Maharishi, who was influenced by Sankara's *Advaita Vedânta* to a great extent, developed an approach to understand the notion of self through persistent self-enquiry (*âtma-vichâra*). In this paper, I will argue that for Ramana Maharishi the notion of self, which serves as a subject of all phenomenal experiences, when enquired in a persistent manner in order not to misidentify it as body and mind, is realized to be the single, immanent and supreme reality. Although known as an influential teacher, Ramana Maharishi remains as an unexplored philosopher and there is a need for a systematic study on his philosophy of self.

Keywords: Ramana Maharishi, Self, Self-Enquiry, Supreme Reality, Neo-*Advaita*

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Introduction

For Ramana Maharishi, the self which serves as a subject of all experiences and knowledge could be realized through a systematic investigation into the nature of self. When this self-enquiry is practiced as a method of meditation consistently, misidentifications of self with body and mind could be removed. This would result in the realization that self is a single, immanent and highest reality. In this paper, I will argue that for Ramana Maharishi, the sense of self, which arises as the first thought when being attentive of the world, when enquired and scrutinized carefully, in order not to mistake it for gross body, subtle body, causal body, thoughts and mental states, are realized to be essentially the single and supreme reality. The purpose of this paper is to derive a philosophical position on the notion of self from the spiritual teachings of Ramana Maharishi.

I shall begin the paper by explaining to what extent Ramana's notion of self was influenced by Sankara's philosophy by discussing how the practical side of Ramana's philosophy of self diverged from traditional *Advaita*. I shall then focus on the starting points of Ramana's philosophy of self which serve as a foundation for the enquiry into what self and its nature is. Finally, I will systematically and critically illustrate the process of self-enquiry by considering Ramana's arguments for the claim that self is not body and mind, but is realized to be single and supreme reality when the shackles of misidentifications of self with body and mind are broken during its persistent practice.

Neo-Advaita: Ramana's Departure from Sankara

Ramana's philosophy of self was influenced by Sankaracharya's notion of self as his philosophical outlook was largely shaped by the philosophy of *Advaita Vedânta*.² Sankara argued for the existence of self by claiming that it is impossible to deny its existence as the very denial proves its existence. In other words, the knowledge about the existence of self is an intuitively self-established truth obtained independently of any means of knowledge. Further, Sankara, being an exponent of an orthodox school of thought, developed his

²Gabriele, Ebert. (2003). *Ramana Maharishi*, 179.

notion of self in favor of the *Upanisadic* claim that self is an immaterial and an immortal entity which is identical with the highest reality. For him the notion of self is an immaterial and an immortal entity, distinct from body, is a necessary presupposition for the attainment of liberation to be possible. In other words, liberation as a goal discussed in the orthodox scriptures would turn meaningless, if self is not an immaterial and an immortal entity.³ The attainment of liberation refers to the realization that self (*Âtman*) is identical to the supreme reality (*Brahman*) because it alone exists as a non-dual reality.⁴ This realization, which is practical knowledge, an immediate and direct personal experience.

Ramana's philosophy of self is intensely practice-oriented. His theoretical tenets on the notion of self are meant only for logically basing the practical side of it.⁵ Although most of the theoretical presuppositions of Ramana's philosophy of self converge with that of Sankara's, on the practical side of it there are a few digressions from the traditional *Advaita Vedânta*. Firstly, the followers of Sankara's *Advaita* highlight the significance of meditation on the *Upanisadic mahāvâkyas* which affirm the identity of self as the supreme reality. These mental affirmations such as "*Aham Brahmasmi*" ("I am Brahman") are not only taken as an intellectual solution to the problem of self, but also are used as *mantras* to be repeated during the practice of meditation. Ramana Maharishi criticizes this practice on the ground that people who use this method find these affirmations intellectually satisfying, as it serves as a solution to the introspective analysis of what self is. Further, the solution which is arrived at, when repeated as a formula serves only to fix the attention on the *mantra*, which is an object of thought. Since the mental affirmations regarding the identity of self is only an analytical solution repeated as mantra, this method tends to misstate the source of this mental analysis and repetition. In other words, during this meditation, the thinker and perceiver of thoughts and perception (respectively) concerning the identity of self eludes all attention as only the thoughts and perception are given attention. The second method which the interpreters of traditional *Advaita* subscribe to is the *NetiNeti* (Not this, Not that) approach to the notion

³ Prevos, Peter. (2002, April 9). The Self in Indian Philosophy.

⁴ Mishra, Ranjan Kumar. (2015). *Advaita Vedanta Tatva and AdiSankaracharya*, 41.

⁵ Osborne, Arthur. (2002). *Ramana Maharishi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*. 88.

of self. This is a negationist approach whereby the seeker consistently avoids identifying self with any object of thought and perception by verbally rejecting all the objects that 'I' could identify with. Ramana, once again, criticizes this method as an intellectual activity whereby self eludes and transcends the very activity.⁶ Thus, Ramana's digression from Sankara's *Advaita* revolves around the claim that the structure I-thought remains throughout all the acts of affirmation and negation and 'I' which affirms and denies remains unknown. Ramana's own method of self-enquiry (*âtma-vichâra*) intends to solve this problem.

Beginnings of Ramana's Philosophy of Self

For Ramana, casual experiences like "I went home", "I read the book" and "I saw a pen" make it evident that 'I' is the subject of all these experiences. Since self is the subject of all experiences and knowledge, self exists.⁷ Further, this consciousness of self is indeed ever present within us. "Everyone knows 'I am'. No one can deny his own being."⁸ Since self, which is always present, is the subject of all experiences and knowledge, it follows that self ontologically precedes all the experiences and knowledge.

Ramana then argues that all experiences and knowledge are mental. In other words, all our phenomenal experiences can be reduced to names and forms which ultimately settle as thoughts in mind.⁹ He mentions, "Apart from thoughts, there is no independent entity called the world."¹⁰ In other words, the entire world of experience cannot stand by itself unless it is known or experienced through mind. The only way to be certain about the existence of the world is by the knowledge and experience of it mentally. Although it could be argued that unless there is an external stimuli, sense impressions as thoughts are not possible, Ramana would dismiss the claim by putting forth that the very existence of the external stimuli could be known and experienced only through mental sense impressions. In simple words, what is not mental cannot impress the

⁶ Godman, David. (1985). *Be As You Are*, 42.

⁷ Maharishi, Ramana. (2004). *Self Enquiry in The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharishi*, 3.

⁸ Godman, David. (1985). *Be As You Are*, 14.

⁹ Maharishi, Ramana. (2010). *Who am I?*, 20.

¹⁰ Maharishi, Ramana. (2010). *Who am I?*, 16.

mind. In his words, "The world is not external. The impressions cannot have an outer origin, because the world can be cognised only by consciousness."¹¹ This means that the whole world subsides if the mind wears off because mind is the cause of the whole world.¹²

Now, if self ontologically precedes all experiences and knowledge and if all experiences and knowledge are simply thoughts in mind, then it follows that of all the thoughts that arise, the sense of 'I' is the first. "It is only after the rise of this, that the other thoughts arise."¹³ Although so many thoughts may attach to each other like a chain, the first thought is attached to the sense of self, which is the source.¹⁴ Since self as a subject is responsible and takes ownership of all its thoughts, it identifies with these thoughts which cannot exist independently of it. This means that every experience and knowledge is closely associated with self by being as its thought. Ramana calls this I-thought structure (*aham-vritti*). This structure is common to all empirical experiences and knowledge. In other words, the whole of phenomenal existence could be reduced to various manifestations and diverse functions of the form I-thought.¹⁵ Therefore, all that exists is the sense of self and the thought which are inseparable.

It should be mentioned here that although Ramana's position on reality and nature of mind, as we systematically developed above, would make him appear as a subjective idealist, further enquiry on the nature of self of the I-thought structure would make it clear that his is an absolute idealist stance.

Self and Body

In the previous section, it has been systematically enunciated that for Ramana all that exists can be reduced to the knower-known or experiencer-experienced structure (i.e. I-thought structure). This structure has two distinct aspects to it: the knowing or experiencing subject and the known or experienced object. Ramana begins the enquiry into the knower or experiencer part of it in order to arrive at the nature of self.

¹¹ Cohen, S.S. (2006). *Reflection on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharishi*, 55-56.

¹² Godman, David. (1985). *Be As You Are*, 21.

¹³ Maharishi, Ramana. (2010). *Who am I?*, 18.

¹⁴ Maharishi, Ramana. (2010). *Who am I?*, 23.

¹⁵ Godman, David. (1985). *Be As You Are*, 49.

Most of our day-to-day experiences and knowledge revolves around our body. Body is the foundation for most of our phenomenal existence. Not only do we know about the apparent external world through our five sense organs, but even the thoughts and feelings we experience appear as occurring within our body. Thus, all our perceptual, emotional, mental and intellectual life revolves around body.¹⁶ This results in a self-evident assumption that the sense of self belongs to body. In other words, the 'I' identifies with body as a result of an owner-occupant relationship between them.¹⁷ Casual experiences such as "coming" and "going" which are respectively expressed statements such as "I came" and "I went" make it evident that "I am my body".¹⁸

Following the tradition of *Advaita Vedânta*, Ramana divides body into gross body (*sthulasarira*), subtle body (*sukshmasarira*) and causal body (*karana-sarira*) for an analytical exposition.¹⁹ Gross body that refers to the mortal body that moves, grows, respire and feeds is composed of seven constituents such as chyle, blood, flesh, fat, marrow, bone and semen.²⁰ Subtle body that refers to the subtle essence of the gross body is composed of five organs of perception (eyes, ears, skin, tongue and nose), five organs of action (speech, hands, legs, anus and genitals), five-fold vital breath (respiration, evacuation, blood circulation, involuntary actions and digestion) and mind.²¹ It should be noted that many a times, Ramana discusses the notion of mind separately and not as a part of subtle body. Causal body refers to the seed of both gross body and subtle body which is characterized by self-forgetfulness.²² Thus, identification of self with body (as argued for above) refers to identification of self with the gross body, subtle body and causal body.

¹⁶ James, Michael. (2012). *Happiness and the Art of Being*, 75.

¹⁷ Godman, David. (1985). *Be As You Are*, 29.

¹⁸ Maharishi, Ramana. (2004). *Self Enquiry in The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharishi*, 3.

¹⁹ Godman, David. (1985). *Be As You Are*, 30.

²⁰ Maharishi, Ramana. (2010). *Who am I*, 12.

²¹ James, Michael. (2012). *Happiness and the Art of Being*, 123.

²² James, Michael. (2012). *Happiness and the Art of Being*, 282.

Ramana gives a number of arguments to claim that the association of 'I' with body is a misidentification and, therefore, self is not body. In other words, there are problems with the view that "I am my body".

Beginning with birth to death, gross body and the sense organs and organs of actions that belong to the subtle body are characterized by transformations such as ageing, old age, debilities and dysfunctions. The sense of self endures through these transformations.²³ The endurance of self through the bodily transformations proves that self is not body.

Gross body is composed of chyle, blood, flesh, fat, marrow, bone and semen and subtle body has many parts like the eyes, ears, skin, tongue, nose speech, hands, legs, anus and genitals, etc. Now, if self is body, to which of these parts of body does 'I' specifically refer to?²⁴ In other words, multiplicity cannot be reduced to one unified self. Therefore, I am not my body.

A careful investigation into the relation between self and gross body reveals that the self has a body. Casual statements such as "I have a body" clearly show that the self is the possessor of gross body and not gross body itself. Since the possessor cannot be the possession and since the possessor is ontologically prior to the possession, self is not gross body. Similarly, a careful investigation into the relation between self and subtle body reveals that self uses subtle body. Casual statements such as "My eyes see" clearly show that the self is the agent of subtle body (sense organs and action organs are my instruments) and not subtle body itself. Since the agent cannot be the action and since the agent is ontologically prior to the action, self is not subtle body.²⁵ Thus, self is not body.

In the previous section, I showed how Ramana claimed that the world is a projection of mind and the entire phenomenal existence can be reduced to thoughts in mind. Since gross body is also a part of the phenomenal world, its existence should depend on the mind as well. Since the modifications of mind switches off during deep sleep,

²³ Maharishi, Ramana. (2004). *AtmaBodha in The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharishi*, 203.

²⁴ Om, Sri Sadhu. (2005). *The Path of Sri Ramana*, 58.

²⁵ Om, Sri Sadhu. (2005). *The Path of Sri Ramana*, 59.

gross body ceases to exist during deep sleep.²⁶ However, the consciousness “I am” sustains deep sleep because self is aware of having had a deep sleep in its wakeful state. In other words, although self in deep sleep is not aware of its gross body, while self in the wakeful state is aware of the existence of gross body, there is awareness that it is the same self which passed through these two states of mind.²⁷ Thus, the sense of self prevails over the state of deep sleep when gross body ceases to exist. Therefore, I am not my gross body. Ramana also argues that the removal of misidentification of ‘I’ with gross body results in the removal of misidentification of ‘I’ with subtle body and causal body because “it is on the gross body that the other bodies subsist.”²⁸ Therefore, self is not body.

The statement “I am not body” implies that “I can exist even without body”. Thus, Ramana says, “Body is insentient like an earthen pot. Since it does not have the consciousness ‘I’ and since our existence is experienced (as ‘I am’) daily in deep sleep, where body does not exist, it is not ‘I’...”²⁹

Self and Mind

In the previous section, I have discussed a series of arguments by Ramana on how ‘I’ cannot be referred to body. Further, I have also discussed previously, for Ramana, how all that exists (world and body) could be reduced to thoughts in mind which relate to self and, thus taking up inseparable self-mind form. Taking into consideration the two propositions stated above, it follows that the enquiry into “I” must now be directed towards the nature of mind and its association with self. In other words, investigation into the nature of mind and its association with self would pave the path to a better understanding of self, as self and not body and self is intricately related to mind.³⁰ Moreover, just as the self identifies itself with body, (which, I proved is a misidentification), self also identifies itself with mind. In other

²⁶ Om, Sri Sadhu. (2005). *The Path of Sri Ramana*, 62.

²⁷ Godman, David. (1985). *Be As You Are*, 14.

²⁸ Maharishi, Ramana. (2004). *Self Enquiry in The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharishi*, 5.

²⁹ Maharishi, Ramana. (2004). *UlladuNarpadu in The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharishi*, 124.

³⁰ Godman, David. (1985). *Be As You Are*, 30.

words, 'I' seems to be the thinking mind. This is evident from the fact that the self is the subject of mental activities and modifications such as thinking, feeling, intending, planning, deciding, designing, willing, believing, desiring etc. These experiences are expressed in casual phrases such as "I think this", "I believe that", etc.³¹ Thus, I am my mind.

Mind appears as an internal organ which takes up various roles such as reflection (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*), egoity (*ahamkara*) and memory (*citta*). However, mind as an internal organ (relative to the senses as external organs) is true as long as there is a distinction between inner and outer with reference to body. This distinction vanishes as soon as we realize that body cannot exist independently of the knowing mind and the knower.³² Also, Ramana claims that reflection, intellect, egoity and memory are all different names given to mind depending on the functions or modes of it.

For Ramana, mind is characterized by thoughts and mental states. Thoughts are the product of reasoning, sensing and feeling of mind. Thoughts are always about something ('this'-thought). Mental states are states of consciousness against which the thought-activities take place. Following Sankara, Ramana divides mental states into waking state (*jagrut*), dream state (*svapna*) and deep sleep (*susupti*). The waking state is a state of consciousness that is characterized by perceiving, thinking, discriminating, choosing, liking, disliking, desires, fears, memory etc. all of which are apparently caused by the outside world. Dream state is a state of consciousness which is characterized by moving pictures created by our imagination without triggering the outside world.

Deep sleep is a resting state of consciousness where there are no thoughts, pictures and activity of any kind.³³ Thus, identification of self with mind refers to the identification of self with thoughts and mental states which is evident from the casual experiences such as "I am sad" and "I am awake" respectively.

³¹ Cornelssen, Lucy. (2003). *Hunting the I According to Sri Ramana Maharishi*, 19.

³² Maharishi, Ramana. (2004). *Self Enquiry in The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharishi*, 6-7.

³³ Cornelssen, Lucy. (2003). *Hunting the I According to Sri Ramana Maharishi*, 24.

Ramana gives a number of arguments to claim that the association of 'I' with mind is a misidentification and, therefore, self is not mind. In other words, there are problems with the view that "I am my mind".

The 'this'-thoughts, which are about objects in the external world, come and go without sticking to mind. "Now, behind every particular thought, there is a general thought which is the 'I'..."³⁴ In other words, 'I' is the root of all thoughts because the self is the subject of these thoughts and thoughts cannot exist independently of self.³⁵ "I' think 'this'" at one moment and "'I' think 'that'" at the other. The sense of self prevails over the passage of thoughts through mind. This ontological precedence of self over thoughts shows that thoughts depend on the self for their existence. Since thoughts originate from self, thought is not self. Therefore I am not my thought.

A careful investigation into the relation between self and mind reveals that self has a mind. Casual statements such as "I have a thought" and "I had a dream" clearly show that self is the possessor of thoughts and mental states. Since the possessor cannot be the possession and since the possessor is ontologically prior to the possession, self is not thoughts or mental states.³⁶ Thus, self is not mind.

Ramana identifies waking state, dream state and deep sleep as three mental states which pass in time. In other words, constant change is the nature of mental states of consciousness.³⁷ Once again, self witnesses the passage of all the three states and, hence, is the subject of these states. It is an intuitive and a self-evident truth that the sense of self prevails conspicuously in waking and dream state. This is evident from casual experiences like "I am awake now" and "I had a dream". Although self seemingly disappears in the state of deep sleep, Ramana claims that the 'I' endures even deep sleep because the very fact that I recall having had a deep sleep after I wake up shows that 'I' was present.³⁸ Ramana puts forth, "...even in sleep, which is devoid

³⁴ Godman, David. (1985). *Be As You Are*, 39.

³⁵ Godman, David. (1985). *Be As You Are*, 30.

³⁶ Om, Sri Sadhu. (2005). *The Path of Sri Ramana*, 59.

³⁷ Cornelssen, Lucy. (2003). *Hunting the I According to Sri Ramana Maharishi*, 22.

³⁸ Cornelssen, Lucy. (2003). *Hunting the I According to Sri Ramana Maharishi*, 24.

of 'I' [the thought 'I', the mind]... we do not become non-existent..."³⁹ Thus, just like various pictures appear on the cinema screen without sticking, these mental states simply pass by the enduring self.⁴⁰ Thus, I am not my mental states of consciousness. I am not mind.

The statement "I am not mind" implies that 'I' exists even in the absence of mind. Ramana says, "You are not the mind. You are beyond it."⁴¹

Self-Enquiry and Self-Realization

Following the tradition of *Advaita Vedānta*, Ramana claims that the misidentification of the self with body and mind results in self-conceit (*tarbodham*), egoity (*ahamkara*), nescience (*avidya*), illusion (*maya*), impurity (*mala*), and individual soul (*jiva*).⁴² This eventually results in the formation of *karmic* debts. Ramana puts forth, "As long as you identify yourself with body [and mind] like that you are affected by the consequences of the actions, that is to say, while you identify with body [and mind] you accumulate good and bad *karma*."⁴³ This ultimately leads to the cycle of birth and rebirth and the illusory bondage consisting transmigration (*samsara*).⁴⁴ It is the realization of self that results in liberation and release from this bondage and ignorance. In other words, liberation is "only knowing the Self within yourself."⁴⁵ Realization of self happens when there is a destruction of the misidentification of self with body and mind.⁴⁶ In other words, realization is possible when the idea of individual self functioning through body and mind is given up. This destruction of

³⁹ Maharishi, Ramana. (n.d). *Upadesa Undiyar*, 20.

⁴⁰ Maharishi, Ramana. (2004). *Spiritual Instruction in The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharishi*, 59.

⁴¹ Maharishi, Ramana. (2006). *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharishi*, 86.

⁴² Maharishi, Ramana. (2004). *Self Enquiry in The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharishi*, 6.

⁴³ Godman, David. (1985). *Be As You Are*, 130.

⁴⁴ Maharishi, Ramana. (2004). *Self Enquiry in The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharishi*, 7.

⁴⁵ Maharishi, Ramana. (2006). *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharishi*, 38.

⁴⁶ Maharishi, Ramana. (2004). *Self Enquiry in The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharishi*, 6.

misidentification is possible only through self-enquiry (*atma-vichara*). Self-enquiry is a spiritual practice of steady and continuous looking out for self that eludes body and mind and investigating its nature. Ramana says:

When other thoughts arise, one should not pursue them, but should inquire: 'To whom do they arise?' It does not matter how many thoughts arise. As each thought arises, one should inquire with diligence, 'To whom has this thought arisen?'. The answer that would emerge would be 'to me'. Thereupon if one inquires 'Who am I?', the mind will go back to its source; and the thought that arose will become quiescent. With repeated practice in this manner, the mind will develop the skill to stay in its source.⁴⁷

Since the very self-enquiry happens in mind which has a self serving as the subject, it is impossible to realize self unless the mind that enquires self destroys. In other words, in addition to the giving up of misidentification of the self with body and mind, there is a need for the destruction of mind (*manonasa*) because mind which enquires self always has another self preceding it.⁴⁸ This means that the only way to know the 'I' of the inseparable I-thought structure is by destroying the 'thought' part of it. Hence, Ramana claims that at realization, the form I-thought turns I-I and the pure consciousness "I am" prevails.⁴⁹

One of the criticisms that can be levelled against Ramana Maharishi is that he never clearly mentions at what point in the enquiry this realization happens. Since the entire process of self-enquiry happens within the realm of thought and since the sense of self would precede the very enquiry, enquiring that preceding self would result in infinite regress. Ramana doesn't clearly say at what point in this regress one would realize self. He simply mentions that the practice of self-enquiry is required as long as mental impressions are present as being inseparably connected to 'I'.⁵⁰ If the point of realization varies from person to person depending on one's mental constitution, extent

⁴⁷ Maharishi, Ramana. (2010). *Who am I*, 19-20.

⁴⁸ Maharishi, Ramana. (2004). *Self Enquiry in The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharishi*, 7.

⁴⁹ Maharishi, Ramana. (2004). *Self Enquiry in The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharishi*, 6.

⁵⁰ Maharishi, Ramana. (2010). *Who am I*, 27.

of self-conceit and karmic history, then self-enquiry cannot be considered as an objectively reliable method to realize self. Ramana also does not care to explain how mind and the false identification of self gets destroyed during the course of the enquiry into self except through metaphors. Destruction of mind, the false identification of self with it and self-realization appears as a leap from the enquiry into 'I' using mind. Hence, there is a gap between the thoughtful mind and the thoughtless self.

One point of defence that Ramana would use against the criticisms placed above would be to make it clear that the answers to the question of how and when the realization of self takes place, one would (if known) eventually settle down in mind satisfying it intellectually. This mind having its answers for the questions would have an unknown self preceding it. Thus, the self which questions and answers are yet to be realized. In Ramana's own words, "Realise to whom the question arises. It can be answered if it arises after knowing the doubter."⁵¹ This, once again, makes it clear that Ramana's philosophy of self is practice-oriented.

As an absolute idealist and following the tradition of *Advaita Vedanta*, Ramana speaks of self as a single and immanent reality and identifies it as the highest truth. He claims that the self is realized as non-personal, all-inclusive awareness and the supreme reality which is ever-present, permanent and continuous. He gives different names to self each signifying different aspects of the same indivisible self. He sometimes calls it as Being-Consciousness-Bliss (*Sat-Cit-Ananda*). It is the state of uninterrupted awareness with unbroken happiness. Self is sometimes referred to *Siva*, the God with qualities and *Brahman*, the God without qualities. He sometimes calls it heart because it is the centre and source of the existence.⁵² He calls it *Jnana* because it is the direct awareness of reality. He also refers to self as *Turiya*, the fourth state of consciousness which is pure consciousness without subject.⁵³

Ramana could also be criticized for explicitly discussing about the nature of self using these names. If Ramana's interest is in ontological self-realization and not epistemological self-knowledge

⁵¹ Maharishi, Ramana. (2006). *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharishi*, 72.

⁵² Godman, David. (1985). *Be As You Are*, 7.

⁵³ Godman, David. (1985). *Be As You Are*, 8.

(because this knowledge in mind would have a self preceding it), then he should not have made claims about the nature of self by giving it various names and characteristics at various times. Moreover, claims about the nature of self also settle down as thoughts in mind which is possessed by a self witnessing them. Hence, I-thought structure would come back replacing the realized state of I-I.

Conclusion

In this paper, I systematically and critically presented Ramana Maharishi's philosophy of self. I argued that for Ramana, self which misidentifies with body and mind realizes itself as a single reality characterized by pure awareness during the process of self-enquiry, whereby the self unties its binding knot with body and mind. I started by elucidating to what extent Ramana converges with and diverges from the traditional *Advaita Vedanta* of Ācārya Ekarā on his philosophy of self. I argued that although Ramana followed Sankara in theory in most of the basic tenets, he departs from him in the practical side of his philosophy. I then discussed how Ramana developed his starting point that the I-thought structure is the only reality. This was followed by a series of arguments for proving that the identifications of self with body and mind are false identifications under the sub-headings "Self and Body" and "Self and Mind". Finally, I critically discussed Ramana's self-enquiry and the realization of self as a single reality with many names and features as a result of this enquiry.

I acknowledge that this paper is one of the few attempts at extracting a systematic philosophical position from Ramana's spiritual teachings on self. I believe that Ramana Maharishi is still an unexplored philosopher and addressing his teachings systematically would introduce a new line of approach in cognitive science to understand self. In other words, developing philosophical approaches to Ramana's teachings on self would lead to opening up of sophisticated avenues of research which would promise to fully define the concept of human self. I believe this paper would serve as a starting point for deeper studies on Ramana Maharishi's philosophy of self. I also realize that Ramana Maharishi would have found this paper a futile intellectual attempt as any theoretical account on the notion of self would be conceived and analysed by a mind of a self that is still unrealized.

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