

Philosophy and Critical Thinking
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Lecture 42: Ramanuja's Philosophy

Namaskar to all. Today, we are going to talk about Ramanuja philosophy. In last few classes we have been discussing Ramanuja philosophy. So, Ramanujacharya has argued about the concept of Brahman, the concept of Jiva and he also talked about the Avidya, and how Jiva identifying himself with the body. So, this is what he is in a philosophy in very basic level which we have discussed. Now one very important concept which is by Shankaracharya that is in a concept of Maya, concept of Avidya. So, this concept is a very important. Ramanuja argued that this world is real and Jiva, soul and this matter also is real which is in a body of God which we have discussed in the last class. Now, this idea is a different form of Shankaracharya philosophy. Shankaracharya philosophy argued that how this appearance of this world and this Jiva is unreal. So, this unreal appearance it can be removed by knowledge of God. So, Ramanuja has a different way to argue. Ramanuja has not accepted the Shankaracharya argument for Maya or Sankarian idea of Maya. Sankarian idea of Maya is an important for the Shankaracharya philosophy because if you read and understand the Shankaracharya what he has used this Maya as a tool of the creation. He explained this world, this creation, based on this Maya because for him this is an effect of Maya. Now, since Ramanujacharya argued for this real world, argued for this real Sagun Brahman, therefore there is one necessary thing to reject the concept of Maya. Since this course, philosophy and critical thinking and therefore, the arguments are important for us and Ramanujacharya has presented a very fine argument against the concept of Maya. So, that is the reason that in this class I will be discussing the arguments through which Ramanuja has refuted the concept of Maya. This argument is on a fine argument and what we will be doing, we will try to understand this argument basic level. So, that you will have an idea of an argument. However, it does not mean that this is the final argument. Later on, even the Shankaracharya school they again defended their idea of Maya. So, it does not mean this is a final end and he had rejected his idea. So, this is an argument and then again there is another argument it is there. However, we are not going to discuss all the argument which is not possible in the one-day lecture. Just we will try to understand the Ramanuja main argument against the concept of Maya. This Maya is given by the Shankaracharya. Now, before starting this rejection or refutation of Maya let me remind you what exactly is the concept of Maya from Shankaracharya perspective. We have already discussed this idea of Maya in the previous class but let me again explain this concept of Avidya. Ramanujacharya argued that this Maya is the cause of this world. So, there is, for him Brahman is only reality. Now, everything this appearance is unreal and ultimately only

Brahman is real. So, if you take this world this self also is an appearance. And this self and this world is just an appearance that is unreal. It is not real. Now, when we are talking about reality and unreality. So, unreality when I am saying this is unreal this is an ontologically unreal or ultimately it is unreal. What does it mean, ultimately? It only means that these are beyond the change. If something is ontologically real and has an ontological reality it means that is not subject to change. Now, when we are talking about real or in the empirical world or empirical reality, then it is subject to change but in day-to-day life we are taking it as my mind is accepting that object as real. Therefore, what we are accepting is as real. But ontologically these are not real. As I have said even in the last class that not only in India even the western philosophy many philosophers have talked about the ultimate reality and the concept of God. Now, in Indian system we have a very different way to explain this world, first. Second, the Indian philosophy is always aiming where that whether final goal or liberation. Liberation in the sense that the removal of the suffering. Now therefore it is important to talk about the ultimate reality. So, if you know the ultimate reality or any philosopher is explaining the ultimate reality, then it will be easy to talk about the goal of the life. So, if the goal is fixed then we can talk about many things. For example, ethics we can talk about, we can talk about the empirical world and so on. So, if someone is saying that only there is a Brahman and Nirgun Brahman is the ultimately real, then we can talk about the set of right action and wrong action. Now, because our goal is now to achieve this reality, to realize yourself. Now, all the action which we are going to perform we will perform in that direction so that I will be achieving that state. So, that is the reason that knowing and explaining this ultimate reality is important in Indian philosophy. You may be able to understand more in detail when you will start Buddhism who has a very different perspective from Vedantic philosophy. So, things will be more clear, that why we are talking about a lot about the ultimate reality or sometime about the nature of this world. So, since we are discussing Ramanujacharya, Ramanujacharya has argued that Sagun Brahman is ultimately real. Now Shankaracharya said that only Brahman is ultimately real. Now, this appearance of this world and the self is unreal. Now, why this again there is an appearance? Shankaracharya will argue that maya is the main cause of this problem. So, while discussing the Shankaracharya we have discussed in detail that how maya is causing this problem. So, this is an effect of maya. So, what maya is doing? Maya is first concealing the fact, concealing the reality and then projecting to something else. So, there is an appearance of world. So, this world is maya. It is an effect of maya. So, this is what the maya is. But in reality, and all it says, then ultimately, it is unreal. So, even there Shankaracharya has accepted the Sagun or determinate Brahman but ultimately even that Brahman is unreal. Ramanuja argued that there is no maya. He had talked about the maya or avidya which we have discussed in the last class in detail where he said that avidya is what when we are identifying our self with not self. So that is the avidya. So, there is a problem and then a solution when you will realize yourself, when you have this knowledge of self, then you will be able to know what is ontologically real. Now, so here maya is in

Shankaracharya is in a different way. The way Shankaracharya, here maya is different in Ramanujacharya. The way Shankaracharya has explained and accepted the idea of maya is in a different way. Remember that we have been discussing about the maya. We also have argued that how Shankaracharya has mentioned that maya is also is in a power of God. So, since what all this about the Shankaracharya philosophy of Maya and just to remind you that what was the concept of Maya. We are like talking about this maya. However, we will be discussing in detail while rejecting the Sankarian idea of maya. So, let us start this.

So, first question what Ramanujacharya is asking that what is locus or support of maya, mainly where does avidya reside? So, there is an idea of maya. So, question arises that what is the support of this maya? Now why we are asking all this question? I will give you a reference from the western philosophy. However, there is no comparison. We cannot compare the two systems. These two systems is in a different way. And, I believe that Shankaracharya philosophy or Ramanujacharya philosophy or any school of thought from Indian philosophy for the matter of fact is a very argumentative, and this philosophy should not be as in a different goal all together. But still for your understanding, so it may help you to understand this idea. We have discussed while discussing the western philosophy the idea of avidya and then saying there is a God who has created this world. Now, the God has only a good quality. Good qualities mean this all is positive. There is no bad qualities. Even in Ramanujacharya when we start talking about the Nirguna world, so Nirguna world is there is no bad qualities. So, similarly when we are discussing the idea of God in western philosophy, Philosopher has argued that God is a perfect being. Perfect being means that there is always a good quality, full of good qualities. There is no bad quality. But we see that there is a lot of bad things in our world. Now, bad things in our world it means there is a cause. Because without cause, it is difficult to talk about these effects. We have lot of ideas which is very bad, and we cannot argue that the cause of this bad thing is something good. So, because philosophically or logically good, cannot produce a bad. So, if the God is good, full of good then he cannot produce something bad. While discussing this cause and effect we have discussed how the cause cannot produce something which is entirely different from the cause. For example, the sand cannot produce oil. Now, so even when we are discussing about the idea of God in Rene Descartes and we have discussed how Rene Descartes has talked about the idea of God. So, there is an idea of God and it means there is a cause of this idea. Since this world is full of imperfect thing, the imperfect cannot give an idea of perfect thing. Again, nothing cannot produce something. Therefore, if you have an idea of perfect thing it means there is a cause. Cause is God himself. Because the idea of God cannot be produced by anything which is imperfect and there is no perfect thing. Perfect thing is only God. So, therefore there is God. Similarly, when we have like idea of bad thing, evil thing it means there is something called evil. Because that is producing all the bad thing, all the evil thing in this world. So, what we are accepting if you are going to say there is an evil, we are accepting that there is no God and then we also have an evil. So, God is doing all good things, evil is doing all bad. There is no such evil. I mean there

is no way to argue like that but there is some post for example there is an argument. Okay fine, so, we also can talk about the existence of evil. So, this is a logical I mean I am like challenging kind of the idea of God saying that fine if there is an evil then we can also talk about cannot say that God is the cause of this evil. So, that therefore what we are doing we are thinking accepting the existence of evil. If you bring this idea in Indian system or in Ramanuja system let us, say or Shankaracharya philosophy. Shankaracharya also says that something is in this world, the appearance of this world and self is unreal, and this is, because of Maya. Now the question arises that is there a Maya in independent existence? No, that is not possible because only Brahman is real and everything is unreal. Now the question arises that what Ramanuja is asking him what is support of Maya? Where does Avidya reside? So, is there any place where Avidya is there? Now we have two choices. First is Jiva. So, we may argue. So, the question is that what is locus or support of Maya? So, first is the Jiva. So, we can say Jiva is cause or Maya is where resides in Jiva mind and therefore there is an appearance of this unreal object, this world. But again, if you are going to say that the Maya resides where in Jiva, then this is not possible, Why? Because Shankaracharya argued that, Jiva is itself is an effect of Maya. So, there is Jiva because of Maya. So, this is cause, this is effect. So, when we are saying this is cause, this is Maya I mean I am saying this Maya is the main cause of this appearance of or false appearance of Jiva. So, when I believe this is me, and who is different form Nirgun Brahman or me is this body. So, all this notion is because of this Maya. So, who is the cause? Maya is the cause and Jiva is effect. So, if Maya is cause and Jiva is effect, in that case, we cannot argue that Maya resides in Jiva because cause cannot reside in effect. So, for example there is two things. For example, let us say J and M, Jiva and Maya. So, this is cause, this is effect, I mean or let us say put in this way the Maya and then Jiva. Shankaracharya arguing the Jiva is effect of Maya. So, cause, effect and if this is so I mean when you are arguing that the appearance of Jiva because Maya is an effect of Maya. So, if the Jiva is the effect, then you cannot argue that Maya resides in Jiva. Because Maya cannot reside in its effect because the appearance of Jiva because of Maya. So, cause cannot reside in effect. So, Jiva himself is an effect of Maya. So how it is possible that Maya resides in Jiva. Therefore, this argument that Maya resides in Jiva is wrong. It is not possible. Now, there is another argument. This Maya does not reside in Jiva but it resides where? In Brahman. Let us say since the Sagun Brahman is the creator of this world, a God and so on. So, the Brahman is the cause. So, the Maya resides in Brahman. So, now the second option or second argument saying that Maya resides where? In Brahman. But again, Shankaracharya has argued that the highest Brahman has knowledge for its essential nature and if Nescience or Avidya, which is essentially false and to be terminated by knowledge of Brahman. This is what Shankaracharya has argued. Now, if you are saying that Maya resides where? In Brahman. Suppose, this is a Brahman and this is a Maya. So, if the nature of Maya it becomes, suppose this is a Maya, it resides where? In Brahman. So, this Maya will become a kind of attribute of God. And if it is so, then even after achieving knowledge of Brahman you may

not be able to remove Maya. So, how can one remove Maya of knowledge of Brahman? So, you are like arguing that you wanted to remove the nature of Brahman through knowledge of Brahman and that is not possible, and in that case Maya cannot be a part of or Maya cannot reside in Brahman. So, which your idea is that it is there in Brahman, it is false. Now, you can take an example of the rope and snake example. So, there is a rope and there is a dim light and you saw this rope and it appearing as a snake. So, you may say that this appearance of snake which is unreal or superimposed on rope where this for us there is a snake when you bring a light then the snake vanishes and then you can get a rope. This is what is all about this rope and snake illusion error or this knowledge, this illusion. This is how we can explain this illusion. Rope and snake example. Similarly, the silver example. How the silver is superimposed or the shell is appearing as silver. But this example cannot be applicable to the Brahman. The reason is the Brahman is the self-illuminated. It illuminates self. I mean this is there is a does not need anything. Therefore, it is difficult to talk about any avidya on Brahman. Ramanuja argues that shells and the like which by themselves are incapable of throwing light upon their own nature, and therefore there is a snake and a rope where we are saying that oh this is snake. But Brahman is something which is self-illuminated. It does not need any extra knowledge. If there is a Brahman then it is not possible for anything to cover or conceal this Brahman. You cannot argue that Maya resides in Brahman. Therefore, the both argument if I will ask that what is a locus or support of Maya. So even you are arguing that this first option is that Jiva, where Maya resides that again is not possible. Second argument, when you are saying Maya or Avidya resides on Brahman again this argument is or this possibility is there is no way to argue for this argument. It is not possible to argue that Avidya resides in Brahman. And, therefore, Ramanujacharya argued that there is no Maya. So, this concept which Shankaracharya is arguing is not right concept and this is how he rejected the idea of Maya. Now, let us take the second argument. Now, the Brahman whose an essential nature is knowledge cannot be substrate of Avidya. This is what we have argued in the last slide. Let us take a second point. The question is what is Ramanuja asked that how can Avidya conceal a Brahman. Now, is it possible because when we are discussing about the Avidya from the Shankaracharya perspective we also have argued that it has two powers. I mean the one is like, first is covering, concealing the reality, second is superimposition. You are like projecting something else. Now, this appearance of this world as self is only possible when there is a Brahman and but Avidya is able to conceal the reality. The question arises this is how Ramanuja asked that how Avidya conceal Brahman and is it possible for Avidya to conceal Brahman. He argues the Brahman whose nature is homogeneous intelligence is concealed by Avidya. He thereby rejects the Brahman's essential nature. Now, what is the Brahman's essential nature is knowledge, and this knowledge cannot be concealed by not knowledge right. Avidya is like so Avidya or Maya is not knowledge or wrong knowledge. So, when you are saying that this Avidya can conceal the Brahman that is not possible. It is light. There is a light and darkness can conceal the light. It is not possible right. I mean

this argument it looks absurd that darkness can conceal the light. So, Brahman is itself is knowledge, its essential nature, and this essential nature you cannot conceal by something which is Avidya, and if you are going to accept this so basically you are rejecting the Brahman's essential nature of knowledge. And that is the reason that Avidya cannot conceal the Brahman. So, this is what he argues the causing light of to disappear means either there's two way to conceal. I mean first you can disappear means either obstructing right or the origination of light or else destroying the light that exists. And both thing is not possible for Avidya. Avidya cannot obstruct the origination of light. Darkness cannot conceal the light, and therefore Avidya cannot conceal the Brahman. So, I hope this is clear. It says that in Shankaracharya philosophy this world is what is an appearance. Appearance is what is everything is an illusory world. So, everything is Brahman and because of Avidya there is a false appearance of this universe. Now, this false appearance is only possible when we are not able to see the reality, and this is an effect of Avidya. Ramanuja is arguing that is this is not possible. Avidya cannot conceal the reality. Arguing like that he also supporting that darkness can conceal the light.

Now, the third argument is presented by Ramanuja. He said that what is the nature of Avidya? Is it positive or negative or both or neither? If it is positive then how can it be Avidya? And if it is negative then how can it projected the world illusion on Brahman? So, now when you are talking about the Avidya that there is an Avidya. The question is what is the nature? Is this a positive or is it a negative? So, if this is positive then it is not Avidya. So, positive thing is to not be a bad thing. If this is a positive then it is not Avidya. It is not knowledge. See this is not knowledge. So, we cannot say that when I am saying that I do not know myself. This is positive. If it is a positive then it is not Avidya. And if it is negative then negative things cannot conceal the reality. Negative thing cannot project this world illusion on Brahman. Ramanuja argues that Avidya which is positive entity contradicts the witnessing consciousness whose nature consist in the lighting of the truth of things. So, that is he is in a real nature. And if this is a positive then it is going against this idea of real nature. Again, he argues that all knowledge established by one of a different means of proof is preceded by something else which is different from the mere antecedent non-existence of knowledge, which hides the object of knowledge and which is terminated by knowledge and that exists in the same place as the knowledge. This is self-explanatory. I am going to say that like when we are talking about there is a rope and then a snake. So, snake is a false appearance. Now, this snake is what when we are saying this is snake. This is again is a knowledge. Now, this is in a different from rope and this knowledge this snake is hiding what the existence of this rope, the reality and when you are getting this knowledge basically you are removing this knowledge of this snake on the same place. That is not possible in terms of Brahman because Brahman has an essentially a different nature. He eliminates the lighting of the all truth of things and therefore what you are arguing it is not correct. So, when you talk about the nature of Avidya, is there a positive or negative? If it is positive, then it is not Avidya, and if it is negative, then you cannot argue that it can

project this world illusion on the Brahman and also you cannot go for the both or neither. Ramanuja argues that it is due to Brahman. I mean there is concealing I will be talking about that there is an Avidya and who conceal this world on Brahman, reality. So, who is this cause? Is it due to the Brahman itself or something else? If it is a Brahman then this case consciousness would result from Brahman's essential nature hence there would never be any release which we have discussed. That how if it is due to Brahman then it became a part of the Brahman. So even you are going to achieve the Brahman or knowledge of Brahman, even in that case you may not be able to remove the Avidya. Why? Because this is what? Because of Brahman. So, this Avidya is because of Brahman. So how can you remove this Avidya after knowledge of Brahman? Because the Brahman is what Avidya is the part of Brahman. Now, if you are going to talk about second alternative that there is something else is the cause of this appearance then we have to ask something else should be I mean what is the cause of other something which is not real. So, this unreal thing is caused by something else and then what is something else? Then something another unreal thing and then what is that unreal thing? Again, you have to talk about another unreal thing and that is how it can go for the infinite regress. For example, you are saying that there is A and it is an unreal, so we will go for the cause we will say something which is again is unreal is B. So, again we will ask this what is unreal what is the cause and C and this is how we go for infinite regress and therefore this argument is not right argument.

The fourth argument Ramanujacharya argue that Avidya is defined by Advaitin. Advaitin is Advaita Vedanta philosophers. So, it is called Advaita and Advaitin. Now, let us take the fourth argument, Avidya is defined by Advaitin. Advaitin is Advaitin philosopher I mean Advaita philosopher. Advaita philosopher is Shankaracharya philosophy, which we have discussed the last week. So, Advaitin is philosopher who believes on Shankaracharya. So, the person what they are doing they are accepting or defining this Avidya as something is indefinable. So, we cannot define this Avidya. So, they are arguing that this nature of Avidya is what we cannot define this is not describable. So, when you are arguing that it is not describable, it is called self contradiction. So, when you are experiencing anything either you fall in real or unreal. You going the either side. So, there is in a world and this world is effect of Maya. So, you have to talk about whether it is in a real or it is not real. So Avidya is either real or it is not real. If you are going to say that Avidya is neither real nor unreal because it is indescribable, then it is in a self contradiction. It means that you himself is not on have an idea of Avidya and, that is the reason that not able to explain the Avidya. This is the it means that there is no Avidya. It cannot defend the concept of Avidya. Now, the fifth argument Ramanujacharya argues that if there is an Avidya then by what pramana or means of valid cognition of this Avidya is. You have organized this Avidya. So, we have talked about that the object and then valid source of this knowledge. So, you have this knowledge for example you are saying this is stable, this is mobile, this is computer and so on. So, this is knowledge and then we have to talk about the source of this knowledge. The source is unvalid the knowledge is valid. If the source is not valid the

knowledge is not valid. Now, Ramanujacharya asking that is there any pramana, is there any means of this knowledge, is there any valid means of this knowledge. How you know about this knowledge, knowledge of Avidya. Because, through perception, it is not possible through inference, again knowledge of Avidya is not possible. And therefore, any of this pramanas is not a valid means of knowledge and therefore the concept of Avidya or the knowledge of Avidya is wrong knowledge. It is not a valid knowledge.

The sixth argument Ramanuja argues that there is a no remover of Avidya. The Advaitin believes that knowledge of the unqualified attributeless Brahman removes Avidya. But such knowledge is impossible because discrimination and determination are absolutely essential to knowledge. So, if you talk about any kind of knowledge, it is an important to talk about this object. So, discrimination and determination is very important. Now what is this discrimination and determination? I will be discussing when I will start talking about even Jain philosophy. For example, there is an object called P, pen, or any object called a table, and there is a growing kid and asking about the table. He wanted to know about the table. What is in a table is all about? So, first thing is in a very important then you have to determine what kind of action, what kind of job can be done to this object or how to understand this object. Talking about determining this object. This object can do L1, L2 and L3. So basically, it can hold a couple of books and so on. But, a kid can come back saying that even that some other object called P is also can hold couple of books. Does it mean that that is a table. So, you will say no that is not table. You also have to talk about the discrimination. What kind of thing is not T. So, first in order to understand T first you have to determine what is T and then again you have to talk about what are the thing which is not T. So, knowledge of T is only possible with two things. First, determination and second you have to explain what is not T. So, determination and discrimination both is possible or essential for knowledge. And both thing is not possible in terms of attributeless Brahman. Because Shankaracharya says that there is no attribute. The Brahman is Nirguna. Nirguna means there is no attribute for Shankaracharya, and therefore, discrimination and determination both will not be possible in terms of Shankaracharya idea of Nirguna Brahman. And since this knowledge is not possible therefore, we can argue that there is a no remover of Avidya. It means that even if suppose you are going to accept that concept of Avidya there is nothing who can remove. You can remove the Avidya because you have talked about the ultimate reality which is a Nirguna Brahman. And the knowledge of that Brahman will not be possible. Shankaracharya argues that how Avidya is possible, you can remove the Avidya with the knowledge of Brahman. So, when you have seen the reality then you can remove this Avidya. What Ramanujacharya is saying this is only possible we can remove the Avidya is only possible when you have knowledge of Brahman. But knowledge of Brahman is not possible. Why? Because knowledge of anything that is only possible if there is a discrimination, determination. And discrimination and determination both thing is not possible with Brahman and therefore there is a no remover of Avidya. And the last argument what Ramanuja presented a thing which positively exist cannot be

removed from existence of knowledge. So, if you are saying this is a positive cannot be removed by existence of knowledge. The bondage of soul is due to karma which is concrete reality and cannot be removed by abstract knowledge. So, this is a positive and this bondage which we are talking about which is done caused by the karma. So, karma is the cause of this bondage that is why we are in cycle of birth and rebirth. And, this is a real and this real thing we cannot remove by something which is abstract. The idea of Brahman, Nirgun Brahman is an abstract idea and this knowledge of this abstract idea cannot remove something which is real. This bondage. Therefore, this concept of Avidya or Maya is in a pseudo concept. It is not a right concept. So, this is how Ramanujacharya had rejected the concept of Maya. He argued that there is no Maya or he argued that there is no Maya the way Shankaracharya has argued, and basically Ramanujacharya established his philosophy saying that there is a Sagun Brahman, determinate God and there is a soul and there is a matter. So, this is what we are talking about. For us, this argument is in everything and argument is not going to stop here. Even later on after this argument there are school of Shankaracharya by Mandan and Surya Sora and they also defended the Shankaracharya philosophy, concept of Maya. And, they also presented a very strong argument against all this argument. That is the reason that I have been arguing that how this Indian philosophy is now very very critical and presents a very fine argument. Even Mandan and Surya Sora have presented a very fine argument in defense of notion of Avidya. So, the purpose or the intention of explaining this argument of Ramanuja is to talk about the argument. How one can argue for the concept and then there is another philosopher who is rejecting this concept and these arguments are very very sharp.

So, thank you so much for your kind attention. This talk was based on this Indian philosophy and also we have something here taken from the Vedant Sutra with commentary of Ramanuja. But since this course is on a basic level, so Jadunath Sinha will be enough if you can go through his philosophy, the chapters. So, thank you so much for your kind attention. Thank you.