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SOHAM- The Bondage of Attachment and Detachment

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Abstract

Soham (सोऽहम्) is a Sanskrit mantra derived from "Saha Aham" (सः अहम्), where "Saha" (सः) means "That" (the Supreme Reality, Brahman) and "Aham" (अहम्) means "I". Thus, Soham signifies "That is I (ME)" or "I am that", encapsulating the core principle of non-duality (Advaita Vedanta) the realization that the Atman (self) is not separate from the ultimate reality (Brahman). Soham symbolizes the unity of the Pindanda (microcosm) and Brahmanda (macrocosm), reflecting the ultimate truth of non-duality.

Human understanding varies based on individual mental capability, perception, and consciousness. People grasp the same concept and it is influenced by intellect, experience, and Chitta Sanskara (mindset). Some may perceive information superficially, while others analyze it deeply, and a rare attain a holistic or profound level of comprehension. This variation affects how individuals interpret knowledge, make decisions, and apply what they have experienced. Understanding these different levels of cognition is essential for developing better learning methods, communication strategies, and approaches to personal growth and societal development.

This paper explores the implications of Soham across different dimensions, from practical life to Vedantic philosophy, and its role in practical life's known and unknown practices. By analyzing textual references from the Upanishads, Ramayana, Bhagavad Gita, and Yoga traditions, this study highlights Soham as a bridge between the self and different levels of psychological and philosophical experiences, guiding both general seekers and dedicated practitioners toward a peaceful life.

Keywords: Soham, Vedanta, Advaita, Upanishads, Atman, Indian Knowledge System, Bondage, Moksha,

Introduction

A saying in Advaita philosophy states that a cat thinks, "I am a cat" this is Advaita. A dog never thinks, "I am a cat" this is also Advaita. What about humans? Do they always perceive themselves as human? Unlike other creatures, humans have multiple bondages due to varying levels of intellect, cognition, and perception. Consciously or unconsciously, everyone practices SOHAM.

The body's working tools like hands, legs, mouth, etc, are Bahya Karana (external tools), while the inner mechanism is Antah Karana (inner tool), operating through four aspects: Aham (the self-consciousness) which gets into bond, Chitta (restless thought-chasing) that develops RAGA (Attachment) and DVESHA



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(Grudge), Manas (the mind) that does decision-making and bondage creation, and Buddhi (the intellect) the stored/remembered experiences and does judgment. Different scriptures refer to Antah Karana by various names depending on the level of the practitioner. Since the Upanishads serve as a knowledge base, they use Manas and Buddhi to denote Antah Karana, whereas Yoga Shastra primarily uses Chitta. In the Bhagavad Gita, terms like Aham and Atman are used interchangeably to refer to the body, Antah Karana, Jiva, and Paramatma, depending on the context. Readers must interpret these terms carefully, considering the surrounding text for clarity. Understanding evolves with practice, shaped by individual experience. Over time, BUDDHI (intellect) and JNANA (cognition) continue to grow, deepening awareness and realization.

The SOHAM is bondage. The question arises: which concepts should we bond ourselves to, and which kinds of bondage lead to liberation? What is the advantage of being liberated? This paper explores these questions and seeks to provide answers. This paper uses some terms in Bharathiya languages rather than English because English merely has proper terms for those. As the term PRALAYA is not "destroy", though PAAP is a sin, but DEED is not PUNYA, if DEED is PUNYA, there cannot be good deeds and bad deeds. The Author shares one of his experiences in childhood when he saw the quote "HUM DO HAMARE DO" on the wall of a primary health center during the 1980s and got a doubt that a person with English knowledge when reads this don't understand its meaning and a person with Hindi knowledge could not read this. So we should use appropriate language for a specific type of study.

Literature Review

1. https://science.howstuffworks.com/atomsinperson.htm?srch_tag=yu7ad4z53kqi6z3m7e4jsz2hae-lslhrb

2. न तद्भासयते सूर्यो न शशाङ्को न पावकः ।

यद्गत्वा न निवर्तन्ते तद्भाम परमं मम ॥

na tad bhāsayate sūryo na śhaśhāṅko na pāvakaḥ

yad gatvā na nivartante tad dhāma paramam mama (Srimad Bhagavad Gita 15:6)

The second stanza says:

Once you come out of your home and do all your work outside, still the work is not yet completed till you reach back home.



3. जीव उवाच

कस्मिञ्जन्मन्यमी मह्यं पितरो मातरोऽभवन् ।

कर्मभिर्भ्राम्यमाणस्य देवतिर्यङ्नृयोनिषु ॥ ४ ॥

JĪVA uvāca

kasmiñ janmany amī mahyañ pitaro mātaro 'bhavan

karmabhir bhrāmyamāṇasya deva-tiryāṅ-nṛ-yoniṣu (Srimad Bhagavatham 6-16-4)

4. "Yato vāco nivartante | aprāpya manasā saha |

ānandaṃ brahmaṇo vidvān | na bibheti kutashchanéti |

etaṃ ha vāva na tapati | kim ahaṃ sādḥū na akaravam |

kim ahaṃ pāpam akaravam iti | sa ya evaṃ vidvānetē ātmān sprṇute |

ubhe hy evaiṣa etē ātmān sprṇute | ya evaṃ vēd | ity upaniṣat |" (Taithiriyopanishad 2-9-1)

Where speech returns, unable to reach, along with the mind—Brahman is beyond the grasp of words and thoughts, The enlightened one who realizes the bliss of Brahman is free from fear—fear of anything whatsoever. Such a person does not grieve or feel remorse, thinking, "Why did I not do well?" or "Why did I commit wrong? The one who knows thus touches both aspects of the Self—the doer of both correct and wrong—and transcends them. The one who knows this truth attains liberation. Thus says the Upanishad.

5. यो न देव असुरैः सर्वैः शक्यः प्रसहितुम् युधि ।

तम् पश्य सुख सन्विष्टम् तृणेषु सह सीतया ॥

Yo na deva asuraiḥ sarvaiḥ śakyaḥ prasahitum yudhi |

Tam paśya sukha sanviṣṭam tṛṇeṣu saha Sītayā

(Valmiki Ramayana - Ayodhya Kanda - Sarga 51 - Sloka 10)



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See that Rama, who cannot be vanquished in combat even by the gods and demons combined, now sleeping profoundly/satisfied/peacefully on the grass along with Sita.

6. शत साहस्रम् अव्यग्रम् आरक्षम् मध्यमम् कपिः।

रक्षोधिपतिनिर्दिष्टम् ददर्शान्तःपुराग्रतः ॥

Śata sāhasram avyagram ārakṣam madhyamam kapiḥ |

Rakṣodhipatinirdiṣṭam dadarśāntaḥpurāgrataḥ||

(Valmiki Ramayana-Sundarakanda - sarga 4 - sloka 23)

Hanuma saw at the front of inner city, a hundred thousand (one lakh) central protective forces which was attentive and were positioned there at the command of Ravana to make sure Ravana to feel safe to sleep.

Methodology

According to physics, an average human weighing 70 kilograms consists of approximately 7×10^{27} atoms^[1]. While this is the scientific reality, we do not perceive ourselves as merely 7×10^{27} atoms.

Instead, we live in a conceptual world and the concept is based on one's intellect and cognition level, with the accumulated BUDDHI one without knowingly does meditation on SOHAM, where the Saha (that) here is 7×10^{27} atoms, Though it is proven in physical science, the conceptual world's first aspect is AHAM. So, the Aham is practiced on that Saha, the 7×10^{27} atoms. Thus, all people knowingly or unknowingly decide I am the BODY. The one that ties the AHAM (the consciousness of self) is MANAS (the mind).

Later the concept of I (the AHAM) is applied to the "Expression of the mind" which is generally called VYAKTHITHVA (the manifested expression of self) the personality. Many times, the VYAKTHITHVA is based on the BUDDHI (intellect) and the CHITTA. The MANAS bonds the AHAM with VYAKTHITHVA and it again is influenced by four aspects DESA (Place), KAALA (Time), STHITHI (Status of Self), PARISTHITHI (influence of Society/Surroundings).

Many people bond the AHAM with the body and many more bond with VYAKTHITHVA. The Chitta Vrithi of RAGA-DVESHA is based on this VYAKTHITHVA. One decides whether the object or subject is good or bad based on the VYAKTHITHVA of the object or subject.



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In Bharat, the Saashtras (Sciences) like Physics, Chemistry, and Biology focus on the body, while Psychology deals with Vyakthithva. However, the traditions of Bharat go beyond these material sciences. At the core of Bharatiya traditions, the Guru-Shishya dialogue fosters Jnana (wisdom) within the Shishya. This process is deeply ingrained in Bharat and naturally occurs among its people. Additionally, it also takes place with some individuals in other lands, transcending geographical boundaries.

The linguistic and philosophical depth embedded in the languages of Bharath significantly influences perception and expression. For example, the sentences spoken even among the uneducated, about the death of anyone often carry an inherent sense of a broader philosophical outlook. For instance, in Hindi, the phrase "वह मर गया" (Vah Mar Gaya), in Telugu "అతను చనిపోయాడు" (Athanu Chani Poyadu), in Tamil, "அவர் இறந்துவிட்டார்" (Avar Iranthuvittaar). However, when translated into English, the equivalent expression is "He died" or "He is dead". Literally in almost all the languages in Bharath, it is never said that he is dead. Rather it is said, he DIED and GONE.

One such question posed to the author by his Guru was: "What happened on that day?" referring specifically to the day of the author's father's passing. The author responded, "He had died and gone"

The Guru then asked, "Have you seen him going? Where has he gone?" This question left the author's mind blank, as he had no answer. It was at this moment that the true practice began, that transcended the boundaries of material science, leading the author toward deeper inquiry.

Since the one who has left the body is not a material entity, material science cannot serve as proof of their existence. Even within material sciences, physics cannot be used as proof for biology, nor can these two validate chemistry. Psychology, in turn, goes beyond all three. Therefore, material science should not be used as a basis to prove Adhyatma Sadhana (a nearby English word is spiritual science).

After meditating for several years on the "concept of the father", which was a deeply personal notion to the author, a realization occurred. The author understood that while the concept of "father" was present in a particular body, the body was referred to as "father". However, once the "father" departed from the body, it was no longer recognized as such and was instead referred to as Bhoutika Kaya (physical body) or Shava (dead body).



This was concluded by the author that he himself is also that concept that exists in the body, till the time that concept exists in the body people identify the bodily him as an author, and once that concept like "father /son / author" leaves the body, then even this body becomes the Shava.

This realization led the author to question: if, in the author's perspective, the concept of "his father" had ceased to exist through the body, what would this mean from the perspective of the father's existence? Further, how did that father think about the concept of a son after he left his body? In pursuit of this understanding, the author meditated for several more months and ultimately grasped that there is an indescribable essence that exists within the body, something beyond words ^[4].

After that realization, the Guru then made a declaration: "A doctor who treats cancer does not need to have personally experienced the disease to treat it. However, a Guru who imparts the knowledge of Adhyatma Vidya must have direct experience of it; without such experience, one cannot truly be a Guru."

On the experience of the same, the Guru then prescribed the study of Srimad Bhagavatam, wherein the concept that resides as every being is described as the Jiva^[2]. This concept is elucidated through an instance where a Jiva is brought back into the body by Narada Maha Muni. The Jiva recounts his experience of taking on different bodies and having various fathers and mothers across multiple past lives.

Subsequently, the Guru initiated the author into the Soham sadhana. In this practice, Saha refers to the Jiva from where the Aham raises ^[3]. It is "seen and experienced" by all the people as if JIVA goes off the body, the body never feels I.

Upon the birth of a JIVA, the parents assign a name to the Jiva. In Indian tradition, a child is typically initiated into education at the age of seven, or sometimes as early as five, depending on observed cognitive development. Until this stage, the child is taught to identify the physical body as the self. Once the Aham begins to develop an association with the body, formal education commences, encompassing two primary aspects: practical knowledge for earning a livelihood and Atma Jnana. If an individual, influenced by Poorva Samskara, is naturally inclined towards Atma Jnana, they are guided to shift their sense of Aham from the body to the personality, and eventually from the personality to the Jiva. Such individuals are then further initiated into Sanyasa (renunciation).



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During Sadhana (practice) the Sadhaka (practitioner) gets many doubts and needs to consult the Guru to continue on the path with mental strength. On one occasion, the author inquired about the difference between Vishnu and Shiva. The Guru responded, "Vishnu opens the door and sends you inside, whereas Shiva opens the door and takes you inside". On another occasion asked "Gowthama when meditated has seen the SUNYA (nothingness)", and the GURU smiled and asked "What about the one who was seeing? Was he SUNYA, if SUNYA, then who remembered that I have seen SUNYA", the GURU said "the one who sees is the PURNA (the COMPLETE ONE)". On some other occasion, the author asked, even many celebrities / great people have many declarations that influence the general public. Then the Guru replied, "Celebrity is known to all, NOT who knows all". Another doubt asked was "If both Rama and Ravana are Jiva, then what difference does it make to me?" In response, the Guru advised to read the Ayodhya Kanda and Sundara Kanda of the Ramayana. Even after five to six readings, the author could not grasp the significance of the suggestion. Then the Guru questioned: "To live peacefully at least one should have peaceful sleep. How would you like to sleep?" Then the author realized, that if one needs at least to sleep peacefully ^[5], one should obtain the path of the one who can sleep peacefully. Should not create situations where one may need lakhs of people to protect when going to sleep ^[6].

The author concludes that in Western philosophy, you are a body, you have a mind and you have a soul. Your soul leaves you. If you feel like you can practice working with souls. In Indian Philosophy, you are the JIVA, you took a body based on your Poorva Samskara, thus to take birth. Based on your Samskara, your Chitta Vritthi raises. You will be taught many things like you are the body, you are the Vyakthithva and you are the JIVA, and the JIVA himself is DEVA since the Srushti (manifestation) started and when it started is unknown, so-called Sanathana. Based on Poorva Samskara some people practice SOHAM with BODY only and some practice SOHAM with VYAKTHITHVA. But the sādḥaka does SOHAM on the self the JIVA. Once the SOHAM settles AHAM within JIVA, he never creates new SAMSKARA and as no new impressions are made, the JIVA the AHAM gets liberated as the AHAM reaches and settles from which it is raised [3], and still exists in the current body like Bhagawan Ramana Maharshi, Kaanchi Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Swami, etc. They do live in bodies to guide others as such "One, who cooks again after satisfying hunger, always cooks for others".



Results

- Understanding Aham (I) and Saha (That)
- The transition from body consciousness to Jiva consciousness
- The Role of the Guru in Transforming Perception
- Realization of the True Nature of Jiva
- How meditative inquiry led to the realization of Jiva
- The difference between Bharatiya and others' perspectives on the self
- The Ultimate State: Soham and Liberation
- Different levels of Soham practice (body, personality, Jiva)
- Attaining liberation while still in the body (Jivanmukti)
- Developing Harmony in Society:
 - a) The right understanding of Jiva leads to reduced conflicts
 - b) Moving beyond identity-based divisions (body, personality, status)
 - c) Influence of Adhyatma Vidya in fostering mutual respect and coexistence
 - d) The Guru-Shishya tradition is a model for peaceful knowledge transfer
 - e) The realization that all beings are fundamentally Jiva, leads to harmony in relationships and society

Further Scope

- Moving beyond intellectual understanding to direct experience
- Realizing that Jiva is not separate from Deva (the Divine)
- Experiencing Jiva as Parabrahma (the Supreme Consciousness)
- Transcending all dualities and attaining absolute liberation (Moksha)
- Living as a Jivanmukta (liberated while in the body), guiding others on the path
- This section will emphasize that the journey doesn't end with self-realization but extends to experiencing the ultimate truth—Jiva is Deva, the Parabrahma.



Conclusion

The journey of Soham Sadhana is a path of self-inquiry, leading the practitioner from identification with the body and personality to the realization of the Jiva as Deva, the eternal consciousness. This practice dissolves the false distinctions of self and other, ultimately guiding one toward the awareness that the observer (Aham) and the observed (Saha) are the same.

Through disciplined contemplation and the guidance of a Guru, the practitioner moves beyond intellectual understanding to direct experience. The realization of Soham aligns the Aham (self-identity) with the Jiva (pure existence), liberating one from the bondage of past impressions (Samskaras). In this state, no new karmic impressions are formed, and the Jiva attains true freedom while still residing in the body—just as enlightened sages like Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi and Kanchi Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swami lived in the world yet remained untouched by it.

A society rooted in such wisdom naturally fosters harmony, as individuals cease to be the cause of disturbance to themselves, others, or nature. This understanding is not limited to a single tradition but resonates universally, revealing that the realization of Soham is not merely a practice but the very essence of existence itself.



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Conflict of Interest

The authors have conducted this research independently and declare no conflicts of interest, ensuring objectivity and integrity in the study of spiritual concepts.



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