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# Means for Liberation from Suffering in Indian Philosophy: An Analysis and Evaluation

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## Abstract

*The problem of suffering occupies a central position in Indian philosophy, where the examination of human existence is frequently connected with the search for freedom from existential limitation, ignorance, attachment, and the cycle of birth and death. Yet Indian philosophical traditions do not offer a single, uniform account of either suffering or liberation. Buddhist philosophy explains suffering through dependent origination, craving, and ignorance, and proposes the Noble Eightfold Path as the means to nirvāṇa. Jain philosophy understands bondage through the accumulation of karmic matter and advocates right faith, right knowledge, right conduct, austerity, and non-violence as instruments of liberation. Sāṃkhya and Yoga interpret bondage through the failure to discriminate consciousness from material nature and prescribe discriminative knowledge and disciplined contemplative practice. Advaita Vedānta locates the fundamental cause of bondage in ignorance concerning the identity of the self and ultimate reality, while Nyāya emphasizes valid knowledge, the removal of defects, and the cessation of suffering. The Bhagavad Gītā further integrates knowledge, disciplined action, meditation, and devotion into a pluralistic account of spiritual realization. This paper critically examines these traditions through a comparative, analytical, and hermeneutical methodology. It investigates their respective conceptions of suffering, the ontological assumptions underlying liberation, the relationship between knowledge and practice, and the ethical implications of their soteriological frameworks. It argues that the traditions share a concern with the transformation of the conditions that reproduce suffering but differ substantially regarding the self, consciousness, causation, and the final state of liberation. Their common emphasis on disciplined attention, ethical restraint, freedom from compulsive attachment, and the correction of fundamental cognitive errors offers a philosophically significant account of human transformation. Nevertheless, their metaphysical claims cannot be reduced to a single doctrine or treated as empirically established psychological theories. A defensible contemporary interpretation should preserve their conceptual differences while critically examining their relevance to human agency, moral responsibility, and well-being.*

***Keywords:*** *Liberation (mokṣa); Suffering (duḥkha); Buddhism; Jainism; Sāṃkhya; Advaita Vedānta; Nyāya; Nirvāṇa; Self-knowledge; Ethical discipline; Contemplative practice.*

## INTRODUCTION

The question of how human beings can become free from suffering is among the most enduring problems in philosophical inquiry. Suffering arises through bodily vulnerability, illness, ageing, bereavement, frustration, fear, conflicting desires, uncertainty, and the awareness of mortality. Its sources are not exclusively physical or psychological. Human beings also suffer because they interpret experience through assumptions about identity, permanence, ownership, success, and control. The philosophical problem consequently extends beyond the elimination of particular painful experiences to the examination of the conditions under which suffering acquires its meaning and continues to reproduce itself.

Indian philosophy offers an especially rich field for investigating this problem because many of its traditions connect the understanding of human existence with a systematic account of liberation. Concepts such as duḥkha, mokṣa, mukti, nirvāṇa, kaivalya, and apavarga express different accounts of suffering, bondage, and freedom. Although these terms are sometimes treated as interchangeable, they belong to intellectual traditions with distinct metaphysical commitments and argumentative methods. Their differences concern not only the techniques of liberation but also what is bound, what produces bondage, what knowledge can accomplish, and what it means to be free.

The Buddhist analysis of suffering begins with the recognition that conditioned existence is marked by instability, dissatisfaction, and vulnerability. The Four Noble Truths identify suffering, its arising, its cessation, and the path leading to cessation. This analysis does not depend upon accepting a permanent individual self; indeed, the doctrine of anātman

challenges precisely the assumption that a permanent, independent self can be discovered within the changing constituents of experience (Gethin, 1998; Siderits, 2007). Liberation is associated with the cessation of ignorance, craving, and the processes that sustain suffering.

Jain philosophy offers a different account. It maintains that individual souls are real, enduring substances whose capacities for knowledge and perception are obscured by karmic bondage. Liberation requires the prevention of new karmic influx and the removal of accumulated karma. Ethical discipline, non-violence, restraint, austerity, and right knowledge are therefore integral to its soteriology (Dundas, 2002; Jaini, 1979). Unlike Buddhism, Jainism affirms enduring individual selves, although both traditions give ethical discipline a central role in the transformation of human existence.

Sāṃkhya and classical Yoga understand bondage through the failure to distinguish puruṣa, pure consciousness, from prakṛti, the material and psychophysical order. Their analyses emphasize the mistaken identification of consciousness with the activities of mind, intellect, and material nature. Liberation, understood as kaivalya, depends upon discriminative insight and the cessation of ignorance. Patañjali's Yoga system further specifies an integrated discipline involving ethical restraints, observances, posture, breath regulation, withdrawal of the senses, concentration, meditation, and absorption (Bryant, 2009; Larson & Bhattacharya, 1987).

Advaita Vedānta offers another influential interpretation. Its central claim is that bondage arises from ignorance of the true nature of the self and the mistaken identification of the self with the body, mind, and other limiting conditions. Liberation is not the production of a previously nonexistent spiritual reality but the recognition of what is ultimately true. Knowledge of the identity of ātman and brahman is therefore central to the Advaitic account of freedom (Deutsch, 1969; Mayeda, 1992).

Nyāya, meanwhile, provides a distinctively epistemological and realist approach. It treats suffering as connected with defects, mistaken cognition, attachment, aversion, and action that perpetuates embodied existence. Valid knowledge removes errors that sustain bondage, leading ultimately to apavarga, the complete cessation of suffering. Nyāya thus raises an important philosophical question: if liberation involves the cessation of all pain, does it also involve the cessation of pleasure, and what makes such a state desirable? Recent scholarship has examined this difficulty in classical Nyāya thought (Das, 2020).

The Bhagavad Gītā adds an important dimension to this comparative landscape. Rather than restricting liberation to a single technique, it develops interconnected disciplines of knowledge, action, meditation, and devotion. Its treatment of action without attachment is particularly significant because it considers how one may remain active in the world without being governed by possessiveness, anxiety about results, or egoistic identification (Radhakrishnan, 1948).

The diversity of these positions suggests that the search for liberation cannot be adequately explained through a universal formula such as the elimination of desire or the acquisition of knowledge. Some traditions regard desire as a central source of bondage; others distinguish binding attachment from disciplined aspiration or devotion. Some understand liberation as the realization of an enduring self, whereas Buddhism denies that such a self exists. Some characterize freedom as the isolation of consciousness from material nature, while Advaita interprets it as the realization of non-duality. Their shared concern with suffering therefore coexists with fundamental disagreement about the reality that liberation discloses.

This paper argues that the philosophical significance of Indian soteriology lies in the systematic relationship it establishes between the diagnosis of suffering, the analysis of its causes, the discipline of human conduct, and the transformation of understanding. Its traditions provide competing but illuminating accounts of how cognition, desire, action, embodiment, and ethical life contribute to bondage. Their claims deserve neither uncritical acceptance nor dismissal through categories imposed from outside their conceptual frameworks.

A comparative evaluation must instead ask whether each tradition offers a coherent explanation of suffering, whether its proposed means of liberation address the causes it identifies, whether its account of freedom is internally consistent, and how far its ethical and practical insights remain meaningful under contemporary conditions.

**Research Problem, Objectives, and Questions**

Indian philosophical traditions frequently identify liberation as a fundamental human goal, but they differ concerning the nature of suffering and the means through which it can be overcome. These differences create a comparative philosophical problem: can the various paths to liberation be understood as complementary methods directed toward a common human predicament, or are they dependent upon mutually incompatible accounts of reality and selfhood?

A second problem concerns the relationship between theoretical knowledge and practical transformation. If suffering originates in ignorance, knowledge may appear sufficient for liberation. If bondage is sustained by karma, however, ethical conduct and austerity become

indispensable. If mental afflictions distort experience, disciplined meditation may be necessary. If attachment to results generates distress, action without possessiveness may offer a practical response. The relationship among these methods requires systematic examination.

A third problem concerns contemporary relevance. Concepts developed within traditions concerned with rebirth, karma, metaphysical knowledge, and ultimate liberation cannot simply be equated with modern psychological theories or clinical interventions. Their present significance must be assessed without either reducing their religious and philosophical content to secular techniques or assuming that their traditional metaphysical claims have been empirically verified.

The principal objectives are:

1. To examine the meanings of suffering, bondage, and liberation in major Indian philosophical traditions.
2. To identify the metaphysical and epistemological assumptions underlying their respective accounts of liberation.
3. To analyse the roles of knowledge, ethical discipline, meditation, non-attachment, austerity, devotion, and disciplined action.
4. To compare Buddhist, Jain, Sāṃkhya-Yoga, Advaita Vedānta, Nyāya, and Bhagavad Gītā perspectives.
5. To critically evaluate the coherence, practical implications, and limitations of their proposed methods.
6. To assess the contemporary philosophical relevance of these approaches without conflating spiritual liberation with psychological well-being or clinical treatment.
7. To develop a comparative framework that preserves doctrinal differences while identifying significant areas of convergence.

The study addresses the following questions:

- How do Indian philosophical traditions define suffering and explain its persistence?
- What kinds of ignorance, desire, attachment, action, or metaphysical confusion are regarded as causes of bondage?
- What roles do knowledge, moral conduct, meditation, austerity, and devotion play in liberation?
- Can apparently different paths be integrated at the level of ethical and practical insight?
- What philosophical difficulties arise from their divergent accounts of the self and the liberated state?
- How may their insights contribute to contemporary discussions of agency, well-being, and human freedom?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary sources for this study include the early Upaniṣads, the Bhagavad Gītā, Buddhist discourses, Jain canonical and philosophical literature, the Sāṃkhyakārikā, Patañjali's Yoga Sūtra, Nyāya literature, and the works of major Vedānta commentators. These texts do not constitute a unified philosophical system. They belong to different historical periods, genres, and intellectual communities, and their arguments must be interpreted in relation to their specific conceptual vocabularies.

The early Upaniṣads explore the relation between self-knowledge, ultimate reality, and freedom from mortality. Their discussions of ātman and brahman become foundational for later Vedānta traditions, although the precise interpretation of these concepts varies among commentators. The Bhagavad Gītā presents a broader account in which knowledge, action, meditation, and devotion are interconnected. Its account of disciplined action makes liberation relevant to the problem of living and acting under conditions of uncertainty.

Buddhist sources develop a different framework. The Four Noble Truths provide a structured diagnosis of suffering and its cessation, while dependent origination explains the conditioned arising of experience. The doctrine of non-self challenges the assumption that liberation requires discovering an eternal individual substance. These doctrines have received extensive philosophical treatment in contemporary scholarship on Buddhist metaphysics and the philosophy of mind (Gethin, 1998; Siderits, 2007).

Jain literature presents liberation through the relation between the soul, karmic bondage, and ethical purification. Jaini (1979) provides a systematic account of the Jain path, while Dundas (2002) situates Jain doctrines and practices within their broader historical and religious contexts. Both are important for understanding why non-violence and restraint are not merely external moral recommendations but elements of a comprehensive account of spiritual freedom.

Modern scholarship has increasingly emphasized the diversity of Indian soteriological systems rather than treating liberation as a single doctrine. Deutsch (1969), for example, analyses Advaita Vedānta through its distinctive account of non-duality, while Mayeda (1992) provides access to

Śaṅkara's interpretation of foundational Upaniṣadic and Vedāntic texts.

The relationship between liberation and knowledge is also central to the literature on Sāṃkhya and Yoga. Larson and Bhattacharya (1987) document the philosophical development of classical Sāṃkhya, while Bryant (2009) offers a detailed interpretation of Patañjali's Yoga system. Their work helps clarify the relationship between discriminative knowledge, mental discipline, and the distinction between consciousness and material nature.

Nyāya has attracted renewed attention concerning the precise nature of liberation. Das (2020) analyses Vātsyāyana's account of the complete cessation of pain and the resulting problem of motivation. If liberation eliminates pleasure as well as pain, it becomes necessary to explain why a rational agent should seek it. This issue demonstrates that even traditions which agree on the importance of liberation may differ over the desirability and intelligibility of the liberated condition.

Barua (2015) examines medieval Advaita Vedānta and illustrates how liberation is interpreted within particular historical and philosophical contexts. Leach (2021) offers a broader account of liberation in Hindu traditions, emphasizing the relationship between knowledge, desire, and release from rebirth. Such scholarship helps situate liberation within the diverse conceptual frameworks of Indian thought.

The existing literature provides substantial studies of individual traditions and important comparative accounts. Nevertheless, a focused comparative evaluation can still clarify how the principal means of liberation relate to their diagnoses of suffering.

Three issues are particularly important. First, knowledge, ethics, and contemplative practice are often discussed as separate themes, although their relationship differs significantly across traditions. Second, comparisons sometimes emphasize similarities while underestimating the incompatible metaphysical assumptions that underlie them. Third, contemporary relevance can be overstated when liberation is treated as equivalent to therapeutic improvement or psychological resilience.

This study addresses these issues by applying a common set of analytical questions to each tradition while retaining its distinctive understanding of selfhood, causation, and ultimate freedom. Its contribution is therefore synthetic and evaluative rather than the claim that it has discovered a previously unknown doctrine.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employs a qualitative, conceptual, comparative, and hermeneutical methodology.

First, textual analysis is used to examine the principal concepts through which Indian traditions describe suffering and liberation. The study draws on classical philosophical works and established translations or scholarly editions. Technical terms are retained where their translation into English would obscure important distinctions.

Second, comparative philosophical analysis identifies similarities and differences among traditions. The comparison focuses on five dimensions: the nature of suffering, its principal causes, the conception of the self, the means of liberation, and the state understood to constitute freedom.

Third, critical evaluation assesses the internal coherence of each account. Questions include whether the proposed means adequately address the diagnosed causes of suffering, whether the relationship between knowledge and practice is adequately explained, and whether the account of liberation creates further philosophical difficulties.

Fourth, historical and hermeneutical interpretation recognizes that concepts acquire meaning within particular intellectual traditions. Buddhist non-self, Jain soul theory, Sāṃkhya dualism, Advaita non-dualism, and Nyāya realism cannot be compared responsibly if they are treated as different expressions of an identical metaphysical position.

Finally, contemporary philosophical assessment considers the implications of these approaches for ethical life, human agency, attachment, attention, and well-being. This part of the inquiry is conceptual rather than clinical. It does not claim that spiritual liberation has been empirically demonstrated or that traditional practices can replace evidence-based medical or psychological care.

The study is theoretical and literature-based. It does not involve interviews, surveys, experiments, or human participants. Accordingly, no empirical findings or statistical generalizations are claimed.

### Conceptual Foundations: Suffering, Bondage, and Liberation

The Sanskrit term duḥkha and its Pāli counterpart dukkha are commonly translated as suffering, pain, or dissatisfaction. None of these translations fully captures their range of meanings across Indian philosophical traditions. In some contexts, the term refers to painful experiences; in others, it encompasses the instability and unsatisfactoriness of conditioned existence more broadly.

The Buddhist analysis is especially important because it distinguishes ordinary painful experience from the deeper problem of conditioned existence. Birth, ageing, illness, death, separation from what is loved, and association with what is disliked are presented as dimensions of suffering.

The Buddhist framework also examines the instability of experiences to which people attach a sense of permanent satisfaction or ownership.

This does not require the claim that every moment is consciously experienced as painful. Rather, experiences that are pleasurable may become sources of suffering because they change, cannot be possessed permanently, or generate anxiety about their continuation. The problem is not pleasure as such but the relationship between impermanent conditions and the expectation that they provide lasting security.

Other traditions approach the problem differently. Sāṃkhya regards the threefold suffering—arising from internal or bodily and mental conditions, external beings or circumstances, and other environmental or cosmic factors—as the starting point for philosophical inquiry. The Sāṃkhyakārikā presents the search for a superior means of overcoming suffering as a central motivation for knowledge of the distinction between consciousness and material nature.

Nyāya similarly understands liberation in relation to the cessation of suffering, although its account of the self and cognition differs from Sāṃkhya and Buddhism. Advaita Vedānta places greater emphasis on ignorance of the true nature of reality, while Jain philosophy relates suffering to karmic bondage. Thus, suffering is not explained by one universal theory.

The concept of bondage (bandha) indicates a condition in which beings remain subject to suffering, limitation, or repeated embodied existence. In traditions that accept rebirth, bondage extends beyond the immediate circumstances of a single lifetime. Actions and dispositions are understood to contribute to a continuing process that cannot be ended merely by obtaining temporary relief.

In Buddhism, dependent origination explains how ignorance, volitional formations, consciousness, craving, clinging, and becoming participate in the continuity of conditioned existence. The precise interpretation of the links differs among Buddhist schools, but the general argument is that suffering depends on conditions rather than arising from an unchanging essence.

Jainism offers a different causal explanation. The soul is real, but its natural capacities are obscured through karmic bondage. Actions and passions contribute to the influx and accumulation of karma. Liberation requires both preventing further bondage and removing accumulated karmic material.

In Sāṃkhya and Yoga, bondage results from ignorance and misidentification. Consciousness appears to be the agent, enjoyer, and sufferer of activities belonging to material nature. Discriminative knowledge reveals the difference between puruṣa and prakṛti, thereby ending the misidentification responsible for bondage.

Advaita Vedānta interprets bondage through avidyā, ignorance of the non-dual reality of the self and Brahman. Ordinary experience is structured by identification with the body and mind, although the ultimate nature of the self is not limited by those conditions. Liberation requires the removal of ignorance rather than the production of a new self.

These explanations share a general structure: suffering persists because the conditions that generate it are misunderstood, reinforced, or inadequately transformed. Yet the traditions differ on whether these conditions are primarily cognitive, karmic, psychological, metaphysical, or some combination of these.

Liberation is often translated as freedom or release, but its philosophical meaning depends upon the tradition under consideration.

In Buddhism, nirvāṇa is associated with the cessation of craving, ignorance, and the processes that sustain suffering. It should not be described simply as annihilation, since that interpretation presupposes a substantial self, whose destruction is the meaning of liberation. Nor should nirvāṇa be uncritically equated with the realization of an eternal self, which would contradict the Buddhist critique of permanent selfhood.

In Jainism, liberation is the complete release of the soul from karmic bondage. The liberated soul possesses unobstructed knowledge, perception, and other perfected capacities according to the Jain account.

Sāṃkhya and Yoga characterize liberation as kaivalya, the independence or isolation of consciousness from material nature. Advaita Vedānta understands liberation as the recognition of the non-dual nature of self and Brahman. Nyāya identifies the final goal as apavarga, freedom from suffering through the cessation of the causes that sustain bondage.

The Bhagavad Gītā presents liberation through several related concepts, including freedom from attachment, realization of the self, devotion to the divine, and release from the cycle of rebirth. Its pluralism is not equivalent to saying that every method is identical. Rather, it situates different disciplines within a broader account of spiritual transformation.

The comparative conclusion is that liberation has no single metaphysical definition across Indian philosophy. It may signify cessation, purification, discriminative isolation, non-dual realization, or the complete removal of suffering. Any satisfactory comparative account must preserve these differences.

**Buddhist Philosophy: The Noble Eightfold Path and the Cessation of Suffering**

Buddhism offers one of the most systematic philosophical analyses of suffering. The Four Noble Truths establish a relationship between diagnosis, causation, possibility of transformation, and practical discipline. They are not merely propositions to be accepted; they organize a path of understanding and practice.

The first truth concerns dukkha, the unsatisfactory character of conditioned existence. The second identifies its arising through craving (taṇhā) and related forms of ignorance and attachment. The third affirms the possibility of cessation, while the fourth specifies the Noble Eightfold Path as the means leading toward that cessation (Gethin, 1998).

The structure is philosophically significant because it avoids treating suffering as either an inexplicable fate or an unalterable property of human existence. If suffering arises through identifiable conditions, the transformation of those conditions becomes intelligible. The analysis thereby links philosophical understanding to a practical discipline.

Craving includes the desire for sensual satisfaction, the desire for continued existence, and the desire for non-existence. These forms should not be confused with every intention, preference, or aspiration. Buddhist practice itself requires intention, effort, and commitment. The problem is the compulsive and appropriative structure of craving, through which changing conditions are treated as indispensable to a secure identity.

The doctrine of dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda) provides a deeper account of the conditions that sustain suffering. Phenomena arise in dependence upon causes and conditions rather than existing as wholly independent entities.

In the familiar twelve-link formulation, ignorance conditions volitional formations, which condition consciousness and subsequent links culminating in ageing, death, sorrow, and distress. The sequence has been interpreted in different ways across Buddhist traditions, including as a model of rebirth and as an account of the dynamics of experience. Its central philosophical implication is that suffering depends upon conditions that can be understood and transformed.

The doctrine also challenges the assumption that liberation requires an independently existing controller. The Buddhist account of personal continuity does not require a permanent substance that remains unchanged through every experience. What appears to be a unified person can instead be analysed through changing physical and mental processes linked by causal relations.

This account has important implications for responsibility. Rejecting a permanent self does not mean denying continuity, intentional action, or the consequences of conduct. Responsibility can be understood in relation to causal continuity and the effects of actions rather than as requiring an immutable metaphysical ego. Nevertheless, the precise relation between personal identity, moral responsibility, and rebirth remains a subject of philosophical debate.

The Noble Eightfold Path consists of right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. These elements are conventionally organized into three interrelated dimensions: wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline.

Wisdom (paññā). Right view and right intention concern the understanding of reality and the orientation of thought. Right view includes understanding suffering, its causes, cessation, and the path. Right intention involves orientations associated with renunciation, goodwill, and harmlessness. Wisdom transforms the conceptual framework through which experience is interpreted.

Ethical conduct (sīla). Right speech, action, and livelihood address the social and moral dimensions of human conduct. Falsehood, harmful speech, violence, and exploitative livelihood can reinforce conflict and mental disturbance. Ethical discipline is therefore not an optional supplement to meditation; it contributes to the conditions under which understanding becomes possible and stable.

Mental discipline (samādhi). Right effort, mindfulness, and concentration cultivate the capacity to recognize mental processes without being governed automatically by them. Mindfulness involves sustained, discerning awareness rather than mere attention detached from ethical or philosophical purposes. Concentration develops stability of mind, while right effort supports the cultivation of beneficial states and the abandonment of unwholesome ones.

These dimensions are mutually reinforcing. Ethical conduct without insight may leave the deeper causes of suffering insufficiently understood. Intellectual understanding without discipline may fail to transform habitual responses. Meditation without ethical orientation may develop attentional skill without adequately addressing harmful intentions. The path is therefore best understood as an integrated discipline.

The doctrine of anātman is a defining feature of Buddhist philosophy. It denies that the changing aggregates of bodily form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness constitute an eternal, independent self. The doctrine does not imply that persons are unreal in every

ordinary sense. Rather, it challenges the belief that personal identity depends upon a permanent and self-sufficient essence (Siderits, 2007).

The implications for liberation are substantial. If suffering is intensified by appropriation—by treating changing processes as "I" or "mine"—then the analysis of non-self undermines one of the principal structures through which attachment operates. Liberation is not achieved by discovering an eternal individual substance behind experience. It involves the cessation of ignorance and craving through a transformed understanding of experience.

A philosophical objection concerns whether the rejection of a permanent self can adequately account for moral responsibility, memory, and the continuity of practice. Buddhist philosophers have developed sophisticated responses by appealing to causal continuity rather than numerical identity between an unchanging substance and its successive states. These responses show that the doctrine of non-self is not simply a denial of personal existence but a challenge to particular theories of personal identity.

The principal strength of the Buddhist approach is its causal and practical analysis of suffering. It asks not only what suffering is but also which mental and behavioural conditions perpetuate it. Its integration of ethical conduct, attention, and insight avoids reducing liberation to intellectual assent.

A further strength is its analysis of attachment to impermanent conditions. Human beings frequently seek permanent satisfaction from relationships, possessions, status, bodily conditions, and social recognition, even though these remain vulnerable to change. Buddhist philosophy offers a way to examine the distress that follows when impermanent conditions are treated as sources of absolute security.

However, the practical force of this analysis should not obscure its limitations and interpretive difficulties. The doctrine of rebirth and the full cosmological account of karma cannot simply be equated with empirically established psychological explanations. Furthermore, the relationship between the cessation of craving and ordinary forms of desire requires careful interpretation. A life without compulsive attachment need not be a life without concern, moral commitment, or compassionate action.

Buddhist philosophy is therefore especially persuasive as an analysis of the conditions through which attachment and ignorance reproduce dissatisfaction. Its complete soteriological account, however, must be evaluated within its broader metaphysical and ethical framework rather than selectively reduced to a modern technique for stress management.

**Jain Philosophy: Ethical Purification, Ahiṃsā, and the Removal of Karma**

Jain philosophy presents a distinctive realist account of the individual soul (jīva). Souls are enduring substances possessing the capacity for knowledge, perception, and energy. In their liberated condition, these capacities are unobstructed. In embodied existence, however, the soul is subject to karmic bondage.

Karma in Jainism is not merely a metaphor for moral consequences. Classical Jain thought characterizes karmic matter as a subtle form of material reality that becomes associated with the soul under particular conditions. Passions, attachment, aversion, and activity contribute to the influx and bondage of karma. The resulting condition obstructs the soul's capacities and sustains its involvement in the cycle of birth and death (Dundas, 2002; Jaini, 1979).

This account differs significantly from the Buddhist analysis. Both traditions criticize attachment and emphasize ethical discipline, but Jainism affirms enduring individual souls, whereas Buddhism rejects the notion of a permanent self. Their shared practical concerns must therefore be distinguished from their incompatible accounts of personal identity.

The Jain path is traditionally organized around the three jewels: right faith (samyag-darśana), right knowledge (samyag-jñāna), and right conduct (samyag-cāritra). These are mutually dependent dimensions of liberation.

Right faith involves an appropriate orientation toward reality and the teachings that disclose the nature of the soul, karma, and liberation. Right knowledge requires understanding the relevant truths without the distortions caused by ignorance or mistaken belief. Right conduct translates this understanding into disciplined action.

The three jewels reveal an important feature of Jain soteriology: knowledge and conduct cannot be separated without compromising the path. Correct intellectual understanding does not, by itself, guarantee liberation if passions and harmful actions continue to produce karmic bondage. Similarly, external restraint without right understanding may fail to transform the deeper dispositions that sustain attachment.

Jain philosophy consequently offers an integrated conception of moral and spiritual transformation. Liberation requires not simply knowing the causes of bondage but altering the activities and dispositions through which bondage is maintained.

The principle of ahiṃsā, or non-violence, occupies a central position in Jain ethics. Its scope extends beyond refraining from deliberate injury to a comprehensive concern with the consequences of bodily, verbal, and mental activity. The ethical ideal is demanding because living beings are understood to possess moral significance and because actions can contribute to karmic bondage.

Non-violence is connected with restraint, truthfulness, non-stealing, celibacy or regulated sexuality according to the relevant discipline, and non-possession. The precise obligations differ between monastic and lay life. Jain ethics thus recognizes differentiated forms of participation in the path without abandoning the underlying ideal of reducing harm.

The principle of non-possession (aparigraha) is especially relevant to the problem of suffering. Possessiveness can intensify fear of loss, competition, resentment, and dependence upon external conditions. Restraint addresses these tendencies by limiting the extent to which identity and security become organized around accumulation.

Nevertheless, Jain non-possession should not be reduced to a contemporary lifestyle preference for minimal consumption. It is situated within a comprehensive account of the soul, karma, and liberation. Its philosophical relevance lies partly in the way it connects habits of acquisition and control with ethical consequences and the perpetuation of attachment.

Jain traditions place considerable emphasis on austerity (tapas). Austerity includes external disciplines, such as fasting and restrictions on consumption, and internal disciplines, such as repentance, humility, service, study, and meditation. Its purpose is not suffering for its own sake. Rather, austerity is intended to restrain passions, prevent further karmic influx, and assist in the removal of accumulated karma.

The Jain account distinguishes the prevention of new karmic bondage from the elimination of existing karmic accumulation. Ethical restraint and vigilance help prevent further influx, while austerity and spiritual discipline contribute to the removal of karma already bound to the soul.

This framework makes the relationship between conduct and liberation particularly clear. The transformation of human existence requires more than a change in belief; it requires sustained regulation of behaviour, desire, and attention.

At the same time, austerity raises a question about the proper relationship between discipline and bodily welfare. Severe practices cannot be assumed to be beneficial merely because they involve deprivation. Their meaning within Jain monastic discipline must be distinguished from uncritical imitation in contemporary contexts. The philosophical value of restraint does not establish that every form of bodily hardship is appropriate for every individual.

Jain philosophy's doctrine of anekāntavāda, often described as the doctrine of non-one-sidedness, adds an epistemological dimension to the discussion of liberation. Reality is understood to possess multiple aspects, and judgments about it may be valid under particular conditions without exhaustively capturing every aspect.

This doctrine does not require the conclusion that all contradictory statements are equally true. Rather, it calls attention to the conditions and limitations of particular claims. Its associated logical approaches encourage careful qualification and a recognition of the partial character of many judgments.

Applied comparatively, this orientation encourages intellectual humility. It reminds philosophers that the description of suffering from one perspective may not exhaust its complexity. Ethical conflict, bodily pain, attachment, metaphysical ignorance, and social injustice are not necessarily reducible to a single explanatory level.

Yet anekāntavāda should not be used to erase doctrinal disagreements. Jain realism about the soul remains incompatible with the Buddhist denial of a permanent self in significant respects. The recognition of multiple perspectives is philosophically valuable precisely when it encourages more careful argument rather than dissolving disagreement into indiscriminate relativism.

The Jain system's principal strength lies in the depth of its ethical analysis. It treats liberation as inseparable from the consequences of action, the regulation of desire, and the reduction of harm. Its emphasis on non-violence and non-possession offers a substantial critique of forms of life organized around domination, acquisitiveness, and uncontrolled consumption.

Its integration of knowledge, conduct, and restraint also provides a useful corrective to the assumption that philosophical understanding can be detached from practical responsibility.

The main philosophical difficulty concerns the status and causal operation of karmic matter. The Jain explanation depends upon a metaphysical framework that cannot be established merely by observing the ordinary psychological consequences of harmful action. Its account must therefore be assessed as a component of Jain metaphysics rather than treated as a scientifically verified theory of causation.

A second difficulty concerns the demands of austerity. The distinction between liberating restraint and harmful self-denial must remain clear, particularly when practices are

transferred from their traditional contexts to contemporary settings.

Despite these difficulties, Jain philosophy offers a compelling argument that freedom cannot be separated from the ethical consequences of one's actions. It makes the pursuit of liberation a disciplined moral undertaking rather than a purely private achievement.

**Sāṃkhya Philosophy: Discriminative Knowledge and the Freedom of Consciousness**

The Sāṃkhyakārikā of Īśvarakṛṣṇa begins from the problem of suffering and the inadequacy of ordinary means of overcoming it. Human beings encounter suffering arising from internal conditions, external beings or circumstances, and other environmental or cosmic factors. Ordinary remedies may provide relief, but they do not necessarily remove the deeper conditions through which suffering persists.

Sāṃkhya therefore seeks a more fundamental form of freedom through knowledge of the principles constituting experience. Its analysis depends upon a distinction between puruṣa, consciousness, and prakṛti, material nature. The latter includes the psychophysical processes through which cognition, emotion, action, and ordinary experience occur.

Unlike the Buddhist account, Sāṃkhya does not explain liberation through the rejection of a permanent self. It affirms puruṣa as a distinct principle of consciousness. Its central concern is that consciousness becomes entangled in the activities of material nature through ignorance of their difference.

Sāṃkhya's dualism is the foundation of its soteriology. Prakṛti is the source of the psychophysical world and its transformations, while puruṣa is consciousness, distinct from the processes of material nature. The qualities of prakṛti—sattva, rajas, and tamas—account for the varying characteristics and activities of the phenomenal order.

The apparent involvement of consciousness in mental and bodily processes gives rise to the mistaken belief that the self is the agent of actions and the possessor of changing psychological states. Sāṃkhya interprets bondage as a consequence of this confusion.

The solution is discriminative knowledge (viveka-khyāti), through which the difference between consciousness and material nature becomes clear. Liberation does not require the destruction of material nature or the elimination of every mental event. It requires the cessation of the ignorance through which consciousness is identified with those events.

This account raises a difficult question: if puruṣa is essentially distinct from material nature, how does ignorance arise, and in what sense can consciousness be said to experience bondage? Sāṃkhya's answer depends upon distinguishing the intrinsic nature of consciousness from its apparent involvement in psychophysical processes. The explanation is coherent within its dualist framework, but the precise relation between consciousness and the processes that produce apparent bondage remains a significant metaphysical problem.

Sāṃkhya's account of liberation demonstrates that knowledge can be understood as transformative rather than merely informational. Learning that consciousness and material nature are distinct is not equivalent to memorizing a theoretical proposition. The relevant knowledge removes a fundamental confusion about the nature of experience.

Once the distinction is fully realized, the activities of material nature no longer generate the same mistaken identification. Liberation, or kaivalya, is therefore characterized by the independence of consciousness from the processes with which it had been confused.

The Sāṃkhya position is particularly significant because it makes liberation depend upon an ontological distinction rather than the attainment of a new external condition. Its concern is not primarily with changing every object of experience but with understanding the nature of the subject to whom experience appears.

However, the sufficiency of knowledge raises an important issue. If the problem is a deep-seated misidentification, it may be difficult to explain how a single intellectual recognition can remove entrenched dispositions. This difficulty becomes one reason for examining the relationship between Sāṃkhya and the more practice-oriented discipline of Yoga.

Sāṃkhya's strength lies in its systematic attempt to explain suffering through a theory of consciousness, cognition, and material nature. It distinguishes the changing contents of experience from the principle of consciousness and asks whether ordinary identification with thoughts, emotions, and bodily states rests upon a conceptual mistake.

Its limitation concerns the metaphysical status of puruṣa and prakṛti. The claim that consciousness is an independent principle distinct from material nature is not established merely by showing that people can observe their thoughts or reflect upon their emotions. Such observations may be compatible with different accounts of mind and consciousness.

The system must therefore defend its dualism through its own philosophical arguments. Its practical insights concerning misidentification may be examined

independently, but those insights do not automatically establish the entire Sāṃkhya ontology.

The tradition nevertheless contributes an important question to comparative philosophy: can suffering be reduced by transforming the way consciousness relates to changing mental and bodily processes, rather than by attempting to control every condition of experience?

**Classical Yoga: Ethical Discipline, Meditation, and Kaivalya**

Patañjali's Yoga Sūtra develops a systematic path of liberation closely related to Sāṃkhya metaphysics. Its famous definition of yoga as the restraint or cessation of the fluctuations of the mind (citta-vṛtti-nirodha) identifies the regulation of mental activity as central to the path.

Yoga locates bondage in the operation of afflictions (kleśas), particularly ignorance, egoity, attachment, aversion, and clinging to life. These afflictions distort perception and sustain patterns of action that reinforce bondage.

Ignorance (avidyā) is foundational because it involves the failure to distinguish what is permanent from what is impermanent, what is genuinely liberating from what is not, and consciousness from the changing processes of experience. Egoity (asmitā) involves the identification of the seer with the instruments of seeing. Attachment and aversion then structure responses to pleasure and pain, while clinging to life expresses a deep-seated orientation toward continued existence.

The framework provides a causal account of suffering. Mental afflictions shape cognition and action, while repeated actions reinforce the conditions that sustain those afflictions. Liberation therefore requires both understanding and disciplined transformation.

Patañjali's eightfold path consists of yama, niyama, āsana, prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhāraṇā, dhyāna, and samādhi. These limbs form an integrated discipline rather than a collection of independent techniques (Bryant, 2009).

The yamas are ethical restraints, traditionally including non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-possession. They regulate conduct toward others and restrain tendencies that generate conflict and attachment. The niyamas include purity, contentment, austerity, self-study, and devotion or surrender to the Lord, according to the relevant interpretation. They cultivate personal discipline and a sustained orientation toward liberation.

Āsana concerns posture, while prāṇāyāma regulates breathing. In the classical system, these practices belong to a broader soteriological discipline and should not be interpreted solely through the contemporary emphasis on physical fitness. Pratyāhāra concerns the withdrawal of the senses from their ordinary dependence upon external objects.

The final three limbs—concentration, meditation, and absorption—address the stabilization and refinement of attention. Concentration establishes sustained attention upon an object; meditation develops continuity of that attention; and samādhi refers to increasingly profound forms of meditative absorption.

The sequence illustrates the relationship between ethical conduct, embodied discipline, and contemplative knowledge. Mental concentration is not isolated from moral behaviour, while ethical conduct is not treated as sufficient for liberation without the transformation of cognition.

Two concepts are especially important in Yoga: abhyāsa, sustained practice, and vairāgya, dispassion or non-attachment. Together, they express the relationship between cultivation and relinquishment.

Practice involves sustained effort to establish stability of mind. Dispassion reduces dependence upon sensory and mental objects as sources of satisfaction. Neither is sufficient in isolation. Practice without non-attachment may strengthen the capacity to concentrate while leaving possessiveness intact. Non-attachment without practice may remain an aspiration that is repeatedly undermined by habitual reactions.

This relationship offers a useful philosophical account of transformation as a process requiring both positive cultivation and the weakening of unhelpful dispositions. It also challenges the assumption that insight must produce immediate and permanent change in behaviour. A disciplined path may require repeated correction, sustained attention, and the gradual transformation of habitual patterns.

However, vairāgya should not be interpreted as indifference to other people or the abandonment of moral responsibility. In the classical Yoga framework, non-attachment is part of a path that includes ethical restraints. Its purpose is to reduce bondage, not to justify neglect or emotional callousness.

Classical Yoga offers a comprehensive account of liberation because it integrates ethics, embodiment, attention, and metaphysical knowledge. Its practical strength lies in recognizing that habitual mental processes are not transformed merely by accepting a philosophical proposition. They require disciplined training and an appropriate ethical orientation.

Its limitations arise partly from the metaphysical framework within which the practices are interpreted. The claim that the final state consists in the isolation of puruṣa from prakṛti is a specific philosophical position, not a conclusion established simply by the practical usefulness of meditation.

Furthermore, contemporary uses of the term “Yoga” frequently emphasize physical postures and general well-being. These activities may have value, but they should not be assumed to constitute the complete classical path to kaivalya. Conversely, classical soteriological claims should not be used to establish the clinical efficacy of a practice without independent evidence.

The most defensible evaluation distinguishes three levels: Yoga's traditional metaphysical account of liberation, its ethical and contemplative discipline, and the empirical questions surrounding particular practices. These levels may inform one another, but they are not interchangeable.

**Advaita Vedānta: Self-Knowledge and the Removal of Ignorance**

Advaita Vedānta offers a non-dual interpretation of liberation. In the thought of Śaṅkara, the ultimate reality is Brahman, while the true self (ātman) is not ultimately different from Brahman. The experience of bondage arises through ignorance, especially the identification of the self with the body, mind, and other limiting conditions (Deutsch, 1969; Mayeda, 1992).

The central problem is therefore not simply that individuals desire inappropriate objects or fail to regulate their behaviour. It is that they misunderstand what they fundamentally are. The self is taken to be a limited individual, subject to birth, death, success, failure, and changing psychological states. Advaita argues that these conditions belong to empirical experience and do not define the ultimate nature of the self.

Ignorance is not merely a lack of factual information. It is the basis of an entire structure of self-understanding. A person may intellectually accept the statement that the self is not identical with the body and mind while continuing to organize experience around that identification. The Advaitic path therefore involves disciplined inquiry into the meaning of the Upaniṣadic teaching and the removal of mistaken identification.

Advaita Vedānta traditionally emphasizes listening to the teaching (śravaṇa), reflecting upon it (manana), and sustained contemplation or assimilation (nididhyāsana). These disciplines express different dimensions of the movement from instruction to understanding.

Śravaṇa involves receiving the teaching through an appropriate interpretive tradition. Manana examines doubts and apparent contradictions through reasoning. Nididhyāsana concerns sustained assimilation of the understanding so that habitual identification with limiting conditions no longer governs one's interpretation of experience.

These disciplines demonstrate that knowledge is neither mere information nor an arbitrary mystical experience. It requires textual understanding, reasoned reflection, and the removal of persistent misunderstanding.

The role of contemplative assimilation should not, however, be interpreted as implying that knowledge is simply manufactured through prolonged repetition. In Advaita, liberation is ultimately associated with knowledge of what is already the case. Practice removes obstacles to understanding rather than producing Brahman or creating a new ultimate reality.

Advaita understands mokṣa as freedom from ignorance and the mistaken identification of the self with the limitations of empirical existence. The concept of jīvanmukti, liberation while living, is particularly important because it distinguishes liberation from a condition that can be attained only after bodily death.

The liberated person continues to participate in ordinary life at the empirical level, but the fundamental error that constitutes bondage has been removed. The body and mind may continue to function, and ordinary experiences may continue to occur. What changes is the understanding of their relation to the self.

This distinction raises important questions about the nature of personal identity and agency. If the self is ultimately non-dual and unaffected by empirical change, in what sense can the liberated individual act, teach, or participate in ethical life? Advaita distinguishes ultimate truth from empirical experience, but the relationship between these levels requires careful philosophical interpretation.

The concept of jīvanmukti is valuable because it resists the assumption that liberation must be equivalent to physical disappearance or withdrawal from all activity. Nevertheless, the claim that a liberated person is free from fundamental ignorance should not be confused with the empirical assertion that such a person can never experience bodily pain, emotional difficulty, or ordinary human vulnerability.

The central strength of Advaita is its radical examination of identity. It asks whether suffering is intensified by the assumption that changing conditions define the deepest nature of the self. Its distinction between the self and empirical identifications provides a framework for questioning possessiveness, fear, and the tendency to derive ultimate security from transient circumstances.

The tradition also offers a sophisticated account of knowledge as the removal of ignorance. Liberation is not understood as an externally conferred reward but as the recognition of an underlying reality.

Its principal philosophical difficulty concerns the relationship between non-dual reality and the experienced world of plurality. If Brahman alone is ultimately real, how should the apparent plurality of subjects and objects be understood? Advaita's doctrines of ignorance and levels of reality are designed to address this problem, but their precise status and explanatory adequacy remain subjects of philosophical debate.

A further challenge arises when the language of transcendence is used to minimize empirical suffering. A non-dual interpretation should not be taken to imply that bodily pain, social injustice, or the suffering of others is ethically irrelevant. Even if such conditions are not ultimate in the Advaitic account, they remain significant within ordinary human life.

Advaita therefore contributes a powerful critique of mistaken identification, but its metaphysical claims must be distinguished from the more general observation that people can examine and loosen their attachment to particular self-conceptions.

**Nyāya Philosophy: Valid Knowledge and Apavarga**

Nyāya is distinctive among Indian philosophical systems for the importance it assigns to logic, argument, and valid cognition. It accepts that philosophical inquiry must examine how knowledge is acquired, how errors arise, and how beliefs can be justified.

Its account of liberation is closely related to the removal of mistaken cognition and the defects that generate harmful action. Ignorance, attachment, aversion, and the resulting patterns of conduct sustain the conditions of bondage. Valid knowledge interrupts this sequence by correcting the errors that guide desire and action.

Nyāya therefore provides a systematic connection between epistemology and ethics. False beliefs are not merely intellectual defects; they may shape behaviour, reinforce attachment, and contribute to suffering. Correct understanding can have liberating significance when it transforms the dispositions and actions sustained by error.

Classical Nyāya presents a sequence connecting false knowledge, defects, activity, rebirth, and suffering. The details vary across the tradition, but the general framework explains how erroneous cognition gives rise to attachment and aversion, which motivate action and sustain embodied existence.

The sequence is philosophically important because it identifies points at which transformation becomes possible. If errors generate defects and defects generate harmful action, then valid knowledge can interrupt the causal process. Ethical restraint and rational inquiry are therefore integral to liberation.

Unlike Advaita, Nyāya does not identify the self with Brahman. It accepts real selves and a world that can be known through valid means of cognition. Its soteriology consequently depends upon a realist account of persons and reality.

Nyāya's conception of apavarga raises a particularly difficult question. If liberation requires the cessation of suffering associated with embodied existence, does it also require the cessation of pleasure? Vātsyāyana's treatment, as analysed by Das (2020), reveals the philosophical challenge involved in motivating agents to seek a state without ordinary pleasure.

From the standpoint of everyday experience, a condition without either pain or pleasure may appear less desirable than a life containing both. Nyāya must therefore explain why the elimination of pleasure can be rationally preferred to the risks and limitations of embodied existence.

One possible response is that ordinary pleasure cannot be considered in isolation from the vulnerability, attachment, and distress associated with its pursuit. Yet this response does not automatically establish that all pleasure should be understood as undesirable. The argument requires a broader account of the costs and conditions of embodied existence.

The issue exposes a fundamental difference between the Nyāya ideal and approaches that understand liberation as a transformed mode of experience. In Nyāya, the complete cessation of suffering is central; in Advaita and some other traditions, liberation may be described in terms of knowledge or realization rather than merely the absence of painful experience.

Nyāya's principal contribution is its insistence that liberation requires sound reasoning and valid knowledge. It discourages the substitution of unsupported conviction for philosophical argument. Its causal analysis also makes clear that errors of understanding can have practical consequences.

Its difficulty concerns the desirability and intelligibility of the liberated state. If the state excludes ordinary experience, including pleasure, it becomes necessary to explain what makes it preferable. The answer cannot be assumed merely because liberation has been designated the highest human good.

A further challenge is that the correction of false beliefs does not always eliminate emotional and behavioural dispositions immediately. Rational insight may be necessary for transformation without being sufficient to accomplish every aspect of it.

Nyāya thus makes an important contribution to the comparative discussion: the path to freedom requires not only ethical commitment or contemplative experience but also the careful examination of beliefs, reasons, and causal assumptions.

**The Bhagavad Gītā: Knowledge, Action, Meditation, and Devotion**

The Bhagavad Gītā occupies a distinctive place in Indian philosophy because it integrates several paths within a single philosophical and spiritual dialogue. Its setting presents a crisis involving duty, grief, attachment, moral uncertainty, and the prospect of violent action. The problem of suffering is therefore connected with a question about how to act responsibly under conditions in which no available choice appears free from difficulty.

The Gītā does not simply instruct the individual to abandon the world. It examines the possibility of acting without being governed by attachment to results and without treating personal success or failure as the ultimate measure of action. Its teachings on knowledge, disciplined action, meditation, and devotion provide interconnected responses to the problem of bondage (Radhakrishnan, 1948).

The text's pluralism should not be interpreted as the claim that all disciplines are identical. Knowledge, action, meditation, and devotion retain distinctive emphases. Their integration depends upon a broader understanding of the relationship between disciplined action and freedom from egoistic attachment.

The principle of karma yoga is commonly expressed through disciplined action without possessive attachment to its fruits. The point is not that the consequences of action are irrelevant or that agents should disregard whether their conduct is harmful. Rather, action should not be governed exclusively by anxiety, greed, self-aggrandizement, or the demand for guaranteed outcomes.

Attachment to results may generate a cycle of anticipation, fear, frustration, and renewed craving. When personal identity becomes dependent upon success, every failure threatens the self-conception built around achievement. Conversely, success may reinforce possessiveness and fear of loss.

Karma Yoga proposes a different orientation. One acts in accordance with duty and ethical discernment while relinquishing the demand that every outcome conform to personal expectations. This orientation can support steadiness in the face of uncertainty without implying indifference to consequences.

The distinction between non-attachment and irresponsibility is crucial. A person cannot justify negligent action by claiming to be unconcerned about its results. Disciplined action requires attention to relevant consequences, while freedom from attachment concerns the way the agent relates to those consequences.

The Gītā's treatment of knowledge emphasizes the distinction between the changing conditions of embodied existence and the deeper nature of the self. Knowledge transforms the interpretation of action, death, and personal identity. It can reduce the tendency to treat temporary circumstances as the ultimate measure of reality.

The precise metaphysical interpretation of this teaching varies among Vedānta traditions. Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Dvaita interpret the relationship between the individual self and ultimate reality differently. The Gītā should therefore not be presented as unambiguously teaching the later Advaitic position in every respect.

Its broader philosophical contribution is the claim that action becomes less binding when guided by an understanding that is not dominated by egoistic identification. Knowledge is thus related to practical transformation rather than restricted to abstract speculation.

The Gītā also presents devotion (bhakti) as a means of liberation. Devotion redirects the orientation of the person away from exclusive self-interest and toward a relationship with the divine. In this framework, attachment is not addressed solely by withdrawal or intellectual analysis; it may also be transformed through love, trust, surrender, and commitment.

This approach raises a significant philosophical possibility. Not every form of attachment may be overcome through detachment alone. Some forms of suffering may be transformed through a reorientation of concern and value. Devotion provides a way of understanding freedom as the transformation of the object and structure of commitment rather than the elimination of commitment itself.

The philosophical meaning of devotion depends upon the tradition's account of the divine and the self. For a devotional theist, the relationship may be understood as one between distinct realities; for other interpreters, devotional practice may be integrated with a non-dual account of ultimate reality. These differences should remain visible in comparative analysis.

The Gītā's principal strength lies in its integration of liberation with active life. It recognizes that freedom from suffering cannot always be pursued by withdrawing from practical responsibilities. Ethical action, knowledge, and disciplined attention may be necessary precisely because individuals remain involved in relationships and social obligations.

Its account of non-attachment also provides a nuanced alternative to the assumption that freedom requires the elimination of every desire or concern. The important distinction is between responsible action and the possessive demand to control outcomes.

Nevertheless, the concept of duty requires critical examination. Appeals to duty can be used to justify unjust practices if duties are interpreted without adequate ethical scrutiny. A contemporary application must therefore consider the moral legitimacy of particular obligations rather than treating every inherited social expectation as unquestionably binding.

The Gītā's integration of multiple paths is most persuasive when understood as a framework for relating knowledge, ethical conduct, meditation, and devotion—not as a justification for ignoring conflicts among their underlying metaphysical assumptions.

## Comparative Analysis of the Principal Means of Liberation

The preceding discussion reveals that Indian philosophical traditions differ not only in their descriptions of the liberated state but also in the causal explanations that determine their preferred means of liberation. A method cannot be adequately evaluated without asking what problem it is intended to solve.

**Table 1. Comparative framework of liberation in major Indian philosophical traditions**

| Tradition | Fundamental problem | Principal means | Conception of liberation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Buddhism | Ignorance, craving, clinging, and dependent processes | Noble Eightfold Path, wisdom, ethical conduct, meditation | Cessation of suffering and the causes sustaining it |
| Jainism | Karmic bondage of the soul | Right faith, knowledge, conduct, non-violence, austerity | Complete release of the soul from karma |
| Sāṃkhya | Failure to distinguish consciousness from material nature | Discriminative knowledge | Kaivalya, independence of puruṣa |
| Classical Yoga | Ignorance and mental afflictions | Eight limbs, sustained practice, non-attachment, discriminative insight | Kaivalya, freedom of consciousness from misidentification |
| Advaita Vedānta | Ignorance of the identity of self and Brahman | Self-knowledge, reasoning, contemplative assimilation | Realization of non-dual reality |
| Nyāya | False cognition, defects, and actions sustaining bondage | Valid knowledge, reasoning, removal of defects | Apavarga, complete cessation of suffering |
| Bhagavad Gītā | Egoistic attachment, ignorance, and binding action | Knowledge, Karma Yoga, meditation, devotion | Freedom from bondage and realization according to the relevant interpretation |

Note. The table summarizes broad tendencies rather than every historical school, commentary, or internal disagreement.

Knowledge occupies a central position in almost every tradition considered here, but its precise function varies.

In Advaita Vedānta, knowledge removes ignorance concerning the true nature of the self. In Sāṃkhya and Yoga, discriminative knowledge corrects the confusion between consciousness and material nature. Nyāya emphasizes valid cognition as the means of eliminating false beliefs and the defects that follow from them. Buddhist wisdom transforms understanding of suffering, impermanence, dependent origination, and non-self. Jain right knowledge contributes to the removal of ignorance that sustains karmic bondage.

The similarity is therefore not that every tradition teaches the same metaphysical truth. Rather, each treats some form of inadequate understanding as an obstacle to freedom. The content of the relevant knowledge differs because the traditions disagree about what exists and what constitutes the person.

This distinction is crucial. It would be misleading to interpret Buddhist non-self as an incomplete version of Advaita's account of the self, or to assume that Nyāya's realist epistemology merely restates the Sāṃkhya distinction between consciousness and nature. Their arguments operate within different philosophical frameworks.

A defensible comparative conclusion is that knowledge becomes soteriologically significant when it transforms the assumptions and dispositions through which suffering is sustained. The stronger claim that all traditions disclose one identical ultimate reality is not established by the comparative evidence.

Ethical conduct is especially prominent in Buddhism, Jainism, Yoga, and the Bhagavad Gītā. It also has an important place in the preparatory disciplines of Vedānta and the removal of defects in Nyāya.

The traditions provide different explanations for this relationship. In Jainism, harmful action and passions contribute to karmic bondage. In Buddhism, unethical conduct reinforces unwholesome mental states and the conditions of suffering. In Yoga, the restraints and observances support mental discipline and the path to kaivalya. In the Gītā, action becomes liberating when performed with ethical discernment and without possessive attachment.

Ethical discipline can therefore be interpreted as having at least three functions. It limits the production of harmful consequences, reduces dispositions such as greed and hostility, and establishes conditions conducive to sustained inquiry and contemplative practice.

These functions are mutually related but should not be collapsed into one another. A person may refrain from harmful conduct because of social pressure without developing deep understanding. Another may acquire sophisticated philosophical knowledge without changing harmful behaviour. Ethical and cognitive transformation are related dimensions of liberation, but neither can simply be assumed to guarantee the other.

The Jain emphasis on ahiṃsā is particularly important because it extends the question of freedom beyond the individual's private experience. A path that reduces one person's distress while permitting systematic harm to others would require a separate ethical justification. Indian philosophical traditions do not all resolve this issue identically, but their attention to conduct provides resources for examining the relationship between personal freedom and responsibility toward other beings.

Meditative discipline is central to classical Yoga and important in Buddhist practice. It also has a role in several Vedāntic traditions and in Jain spiritual discipline.

The philosophical significance of meditation lies in the recognition that ordinary experience is shaped by habitual patterns of attention, interpretation, and response. A person may understand intellectually that a particular attachment is harmful while continuing to respond automatically when that attachment is threatened. The transformation of understanding may therefore require sustained practice.

In Yoga, concentration and meditation support the restraint of mental fluctuations and the development of discriminative insight. In Buddhism, mindfulness and concentration form part of a path integrating ethical conduct and wisdom. In Advaita, sustained contemplation may help assimilate knowledge and address persistent misidentification. In Jainism, meditation contributes to the discipline through which passions and karmic bondage are addressed.

These similarities do not prove that the traditions aim at identical meditative experiences. Their practices are embedded in different accounts of consciousness and liberation. Nor does the subjective intensity of a meditative experience establish the metaphysical truth of the interpretation assigned to it.

Meditation is thus best understood comparatively as a family of disciplined practices whose purposes must be specified by reference to the traditions that employ them.

The relationship between desire and suffering is one of the most significant areas of convergence among the traditions. Buddhism analyses craving and clinging; Jainism emphasizes the restraint of passions and possession; Yoga identifies attachment and aversion as afflictions; Advaita examines identification with objects and limiting conditions; and the Gītā develops the ideal of action without possessive attachment.

Yet the traditions do not simply demand the elimination of every form of motivation. Buddhist practice requires intention and effort. Jain liberation involves deliberate ethical discipline. Yoga requires sustained practice. The Gītā explicitly supports disciplined action. Advaita requires inquiry into the nature of reality.

The problem is therefore not adequately described as the existence of desire in every form. A more precise distinction is between the intentions required for ethical and philosophical practice and the forms of craving, possessiveness, or identification that generate bondage.

This distinction helps resolve an apparent paradox: if every desire must disappear, how can anyone rationally seek liberation? The answer varies across traditions, but many distinguish liberating discipline from the compulsive desire for control, possession, or permanent satisfaction.

The distinction should not be overstated. A tradition may still regard the desire for liberation as requiring eventual transformation or relinquishment. The point is that the path cannot be reduced to a simple instruction to stop wanting anything.

Devotion is most explicit in the Bhagavad Gītā's devotional teachings and in theistic Vedānta traditions. Its role differs from the primarily epistemological approaches of classical Nyāya and Advaita, and from the non-theistic soteriological framework of Buddhism.

Devotion can be interpreted as a transformation of the orientation of the self. Instead of organizing life exclusively around personal acquisition, the practitioner directs attention and commitment toward the divine. This may alter the meaning of suffering by situating personal difficulties within a broader religious and moral horizon.

The philosophical strength of this approach is that it recognizes the importance of love, trust, and commitment in human transformation. Freedom need not be interpreted only as the reduction of desire; it may also involve a reorganization of what is valued.

However, devotion depends upon assumptions about the divine and the nature of the relationship between the human person and ultimate reality. Those assumptions cannot be treated as universally shared among Indian philosophical systems. Devotion is consequently an important path within particular traditions, not a neutral technique that can be imposed upon every school.

Austerity is particularly important in Jainism, while disciplined restraint and bodily regulation are also present in Yoga and other Indian traditions. These practices reflect the recognition that habits of consumption, bodily indulgence, and uncontrolled activity can reinforce attachment.

Yet austerity also raises the question of whether liberation requires the rejection of bodily welfare. A critical evaluation must distinguish disciplined restraint from the belief that pain is inherently purifying. Austerity has a specific role within Jain metaphysics, and it should not be generalized into the proposition that greater deprivation always produces greater freedom.

The same caution applies to contemporary interpretations of Yoga. Physical postures and breath regulation may be practised for health, but the classical path is oriented toward a more comprehensive soteriological goal. Conversely, the existence of a traditional spiritual interpretation does not establish the efficacy or safety of every modern adaptation.

The appropriate comparative conclusion is that embodied practices may contribute to the regulation of conduct and attention, but their value depends upon their aims, context, ethical implications, and the particular claims made for them.

**Critical Evaluation: Convergence, Difference, and Philosophical Difficulties**

One of the central questions emerging from the comparison concerns the level at which suffering should be explained.

A psychological account emphasizes habitual patterns of thought, emotional reactivity, craving, and avoidance. An ethical account focuses on harmful action, injustice, and the consequences of conduct. A metaphysical account asks whether ordinary experience rests upon mistaken assumptions concerning selfhood, consciousness, or reality.

The traditions considered here frequently combine these dimensions, but they do not assign them equal priority. Buddhism integrates ethical and contemplative practice with a metaphysical analysis of dependent origination and non-self. Jainism explains ethical conduct through a realist account of souls and karma. Sāṃkhya and Yoga place liberation within a dualist ontology. Advaita treats ignorance of non-dual reality as fundamental. Nyāya links epistemic error to defects and action.

This diversity suggests that no single explanatory level can simply replace the others. The psychological analysis of attachment does not by itself establish or refute a metaphysical theory of the self. An ethical analysis of harmful conduct does not answer every question about consciousness. A metaphysical account of liberation does not automatically settle the practical question of how to respond to bodily pain or social injustice.

A comprehensive evaluation should therefore ask which claims are being made and what kind of argument would be needed to support them.

The comparison also reveals disagreement over the sufficiency of knowledge.

Advaita places liberating knowledge at the centre of its account, although it recognizes preparatory disciplines and the need to resolve doubts and assimilate understanding. Sāṃkhya similarly emphasizes discriminative knowledge. Nyāya links valid cognition to the removal of the causes of bondage.

Buddhism and Jainism also emphasize knowledge, but their paths explicitly integrate it with ethical conduct and mental or spiritual discipline. Yoga gives sustained practice a central place in the transformation of the mind. The Gītā integrates knowledge with action and devotion.

The apparent disagreement may be partly clarified by distinguishing knowledge as a correct proposition from knowledge as a transformed understanding of reality. If liberation requires the removal of deeply rooted ignorance, merely accepting a statement may not be sufficient. The relevant knowledge must be understood in terms of its relation to habits, motives, and practical life.

This clarification does not eliminate all doctrinal differences. Advaita's claim that self-knowledge removes fundamental ignorance remains different from Buddhism's account of insight into non-self. Nevertheless, the comparison shows why intellectual understanding and disciplined practice need not be treated as competing explanations in every respect.

The deepest metaphysical disagreement concerns the nature of the self.

Advaita identifies the true self with Brahman. Sāṃkhya and Yoga affirm puruṣa as a distinct principle of consciousness. Jainism maintains that individual souls are real and enduring. Nyāya accepts enduring selves within a realist account of the

world. Buddhism rejects the idea that the person contains a permanent, independent self.

These positions cannot all be true in their strongest and most direct formulations. An enduring individual soul and the denial of a permanent self represent different claims about personal existence. Likewise, non-dual identity with Brahman differs from the isolation of consciousness from material nature.

It is possible to identify practical similarities without resolving these metaphysical disagreements. For example, several traditions challenge the assumption that a person should identify completely with transient experiences, possessions, or desires. Yet the explanations they offer for this insight remain different.

A rigorous comparative philosophy should neither force a premature reconciliation nor assume that practical convergence makes metaphysical questions irrelevant. The differences are central to understanding what each tradition means by freedom.

A further issue concerns the status of liberation itself. Is it a state that can be attained through a sequence of practices, a realization of what is already true, a cessation of particular causes, or the completion of a process of karmic purification?

The traditions offer different answers. Advaita understands liberation as knowledge of the self's true nature rather than the production of ultimate reality. Jainism describes the soul's complete release from karmic bondage. Buddhism emphasizes the cessation of craving and ignorance. Yoga describes the isolation of consciousness from material nature. Nyāya presents liberation through the cessation of the causes of suffering.

These different accounts also imply different relationships between means and end. If liberation is the recognition of an existing reality, practice removes obstacles to knowledge. If it requires the removal of karmic bondage, disciplined action and purification are central. If it involves the cessation of conditions sustaining suffering, the path must eliminate those conditions.

The question of attainability cannot be resolved through a single universal theory. Each tradition must explain how its proposed means can accomplish the particular state it identifies as liberation.

The traditions discussed here often emphasize ignorance, desire, attachment, and karma. These explanations can illuminate dimensions of human suffering, but they must be applied carefully to social conditions.

Poverty, discrimination, exploitation, violence, displacement, and political oppression cannot be adequately explained solely by the psychological attachments of those who experience them. They involve material circumstances, institutional arrangements, and the actions of other people. A philosophical account that interprets every form of suffering as an individual's failure to overcome attachment risks obscuring responsibility and injustice.

At the same time, the recognition of structural causes does not make questions of agency, ethical conduct, or the transformation of attitudes irrelevant. Indian philosophical traditions provide resources for examining both personal conduct and broader moral obligations, although their historical interpretations have not always resolved these issues in the same way.

A contemporary application should therefore distinguish between suffering that can be addressed through changes in individual understanding and conduct, suffering that requires collective or institutional action, and conditions requiring medical or psychological intervention. These categories may overlap, but none should be substituted automatically for the others.

The language of liberation is increasingly interpreted through the vocabulary of mindfulness, resilience, mental health, and well-being. Such comparisons may be productive when carefully limited, but they also create conceptual risks.

A reduction in stress is not necessarily equivalent to liberation from rebirth. Psychological flexibility does not establish the truth of Advaita metaphysics. Improved attentional control does not demonstrate the Jain theory of karmic matter. A contemplative experience cannot, by itself, verify a particular doctrine of consciousness.

Conversely, the fact that traditional soteriological systems pursue goals beyond ordinary psychological well-being does not make their practical insights irrelevant. Their analyses of attachment, conduct, self-understanding, and attention may contribute to contemporary philosophical discussions of how people relate to suffering.

The proper approach is one of disciplined comparison. Traditional claims should be interpreted within their own frameworks, while contemporary empirical claims should be evaluated using appropriate evidence. This avoids both the reduction of Indian philosophy to therapeutic technique and the uncritical assertion that ancient doctrines have already answered modern scientific questions.

**Toward an Integrative Philosophical Framework**

The comparative analysis permits the development of an integrative framework, provided that integration is understood at the level of analytical dimensions and practical questions rather than as the fusion of incompatible metaphysical doctrines.

The first requirement is an accurate diagnosis. The traditions repeatedly challenge the assumption that suffering can be overcome by changing external circumstances alone. They direct attention toward the relationship between external events, mental interpretation, ethical action, and deeper assumptions about identity.

This insight should not be interpreted as denying the reality of external harm. Instead, it requires distinguishing the event that produces suffering from the additional conditions through which suffering may be prolonged or intensified.

A complete diagnosis therefore examines bodily conditions, social circumstances, patterns of cognition, habitual desires, and the philosophical assumptions that shape the interpretation of experience.

The second dimension is knowledge. Across the traditions, liberation requires a more adequate understanding of reality, the person, or the causes of bondage.

The content of that knowledge remains contested. Buddhist insight into non-self cannot be equated with Advaita's knowledge of the identity of self and Brahman. Jain knowledge of the soul differs from Nyāya's realist account of persons and cognition.

Nevertheless, each tradition provides a reason to examine the assumptions that structure ordinary experience. Philosophical inquiry can reveal that beliefs about permanence, ownership, identity, or control are less secure than they initially appear. The result may be a more critical relationship to the thoughts and desires that govern conduct.

The third dimension is ethical transformation. Knowledge that does not affect conduct may fail to address important sources of suffering. Non-violence, truthfulness, restraint, responsible action, and concern for others contribute to the quality of individual and collective life.

Jainism offers a particularly demanding account of non-violence; Buddhism integrates moral conduct into the path; Yoga places ethical restraints at its foundation; and the Gītā connects action with discipline and freedom from possessiveness.

An integrative framework should treat ethical conduct as more than a technique for personal calm. Its significance also lies in the reduction of harm to others and the recognition of obligations that extend beyond individual preference.

The fourth dimension is sustained practice. Knowledge and ethical commitment may require repeated cultivation before they become stable features of conduct.

Meditation, self-examination, disciplined action, and restraint can be understood as different methods of transforming habitual responses. Their specific purposes depend upon the tradition in which they are practised. The common analytical question is whether a particular practice addresses the conditions that sustain the problem it is intended to resolve.

This principle discourages the uncritical combination of techniques from different traditions. A practice should not be removed from its ethical and philosophical context without considering how that context shapes its meaning.

The fifth dimension is a transformed relationship to desire and outcome. Several traditions suggest that suffering is intensified when a person demands permanent security from conditions that remain vulnerable to change.

Non-attachment can therefore be understood as a reduction in possessive dependence, not as the abandonment of every concern. It may allow individuals to act responsibly while recognizing that outcomes cannot be controlled completely.

This interpretation is particularly useful in the Gītā's account of disciplined action. It also resonates with Buddhist analyses of craving and Yoga's account of dispassion, while remaining compatible with important differences among the traditions.

The final dimension is critical reflection. An integrative framework must remain open to disagreement and correction. It should not presume that every tradition describes the same ultimate reality in different words.

The value of comparison lies partly in exposing questions that a single system may leave unresolved. Buddhist non-self challenges substantialist theories of identity; Advaita questions the assumption that empirical individuality defines the self; Jainism highlights the moral significance of action and non-violence; Nyāya insists upon valid reasoning; and Yoga emphasizes the disciplined transformation of attention.

These perspectives can be placed in dialogue without erasing their differences. The resulting framework is pluralistic but not relativistic: it recognizes competing claims and evaluates them through argument rather than assuming that every claim is equally justified.

**Contemporary Philosophical Implications**

The traditions offer different accounts of agency, but each raises questions about the conditions under which individuals act and the extent to which those conditions can be transformed.

Buddhist causal analysis suggests that conduct depends upon conditions rather than an entirely independent self. Jainism emphasizes the moral consequences of action. Nyāya links cognition, defects, and activity. The Gītā examines the relationship between duty, motivation, and attachment to results.

Taken together, these approaches challenge the assumption that freedom is simply the unrestricted ability to satisfy

immediate preferences. A person may be able to act according to a desire while remaining governed by compulsive attachment, distorted understanding, or harmful habits.

Freedom may therefore require the capacity to examine motives, recognize consequences, and act according to considered ethical commitments. This is a philosophical interpretation of their practical insights, not proof that the traditions share one theory of free will.

Many forms of suffering arise from the attempt to secure permanent control over conditions that cannot be controlled completely. Ageing, illness, loss, uncertainty, and the decisions of other people place limits upon personal agency.

Indian soteriological traditions address these limits in different ways. Buddhism examines attachment to impermanent conditions. Yoga and Sāṃkhya question the identification of consciousness with changing psychophysical processes. Advaita challenges the identification of the self with empirical limitations. The Gītā emphasizes action without possessive attachment to results.

Their common philosophical implication is that agency should not be confused with omnipotence. Acting responsibly does not require the belief that every result can be guaranteed. Recognition of this limitation may reduce futile attempts at control while preserving the responsibility to act where action is possible.

Liberation is sometimes interpreted as an exclusively individual achievement. Yet the traditions also raise questions about conduct toward other beings.

Jain non-violence places an extensive ethical responsibility upon the practitioner. Buddhist ethics emphasizes harmlessness and the cultivation of goodwill. The Gītā links disciplined action with obligations that exceed private preference. Yoga's ethical restraints similarly regulate relations with others.

These approaches suggest that the pursuit of freedom cannot be evaluated solely through an individual's subjective state. The ethical consequences of conduct matter, even when the precise metaphysical explanation differs among traditions.

A contemporary philosophy of liberation should therefore ask whether a proposed path encourages responsibility, reduces harmful conduct, and acknowledges the claims of others. The absence of personal distress cannot, by itself, establish moral adequacy.

A final implication concerns the relationship between conviction and inquiry. Indian philosophy contains traditions of rigorous debate, textual interpretation, reasoning, and contemplative practice. Its diversity demonstrates that the search for liberation has not produced universal agreement about the nature of reality.

This diversity is an intellectual resource. It encourages philosophers to distinguish the strength of an argument from the authority of a tradition and to recognize that profound practical commitments do not remove the need for critical reflection.

Jain anekāntavāda provides one explicit framework for considering the partial character of judgments. Nyāya emphasizes the conditions of valid cognition. Buddhist philosophy challenges assumptions about permanent identity. Vedānta examines the limits of ordinary self-understanding. These approaches differ, but each makes the examination of assumptions central to philosophical inquiry.

The contemporary relevance of Indian philosophy consequently lies not only in its proposed techniques for overcoming suffering but also in its capacity to sustain demanding questions about knowledge, identity, ethical conduct, and the limits of human understanding.

## CONCLUSION

The search for liberation from suffering constitutes a major organizing concern of Indian philosophy, but it does not produce a single, uniform doctrine of human existence or freedom. The traditions examined in this paper offer different diagnoses of suffering and correspondingly different accounts of the means by which it can be overcome. Their similarities are philosophically significant, but their disagreements are equally important.

Buddhist philosophy locates the persistence of suffering in ignorance, craving, clinging, and dependent processes. Its Noble Eightfold Path integrates wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline. Its rejection of a permanent self challenges the assumption that freedom requires the discovery of an enduring individual substance. Liberation is associated with the cessation of the conditions that sustain suffering rather than with the realization of an eternal personal essence.

Jain philosophy, by contrast, affirms enduring individual souls whose capacities are obscured by karmic bondage. Right faith, right knowledge, right conduct, non-violence, restraint, and austerity constitute an integrated path of purification. Its distinctive contribution is the close connection it establishes between liberation and the ethical consequences of action. Freedom is not merely an inward condition but a transformation requiring sustained moral discipline.

Sāṃkhya and classical Yoga explain bondage through the failure to distinguish consciousness from material nature. Discriminative knowledge is central to liberation, while

Yoga elaborates the ethical, embodied, and contemplative disciplines through which the conditions of ignorance are addressed. These systems emphasize the need to transform not only abstract beliefs but also habitual patterns of identification and attention.

Advaita Vedānta interprets bondage through ignorance of the non-dual nature of the self and Brahman. Its emphasis on self-knowledge provides a radical challenge to the identification of the self with changing empirical conditions. Nyāya, meanwhile, highlights the importance of valid cognition and rational inquiry in removing the errors and defects that sustain bondage. Its account of apavarga also reveals a difficult philosophical question concerning whether complete freedom from suffering requires the cessation of pleasure and how such a state can be rationally desired.

The Bhagavad Gītā contributes an integrated account of knowledge, disciplined action, meditation, and devotion. Its teaching on action without possessive attachment is especially relevant to the problem of living responsibly under conditions of uncertainty. It suggests that freedom need not entail withdrawal from every practical obligation, but may involve a transformation in the relationship between action, motivation, and results.

The comparative analysis supports three principal conclusions.

First, liberation is inseparable from a diagnosis of suffering. Each tradition specifies the conditions that sustain bondage and proposes methods corresponding to that diagnosis. No method can be evaluated adequately without considering the problem it is intended to resolve. The Buddhist path, Jain discipline, Yogic practice, Advaitic inquiry, and Nyāya epistemology therefore require interpretation within their respective philosophical frameworks.

Second, knowledge, ethical conduct, and disciplined practice are interconnected but not interchangeable. Correct understanding may be insufficient if habitual conduct continues to reinforce harmful dispositions. Ethical behaviour may fail to transform deeper misunderstandings, while meditation detached from ethical responsibility may not address the causes of interpersonal harm. The traditions provide different explanations of this relationship, but their combined study shows the importance of considering intellectual, practical, and moral dimensions together.

Third, the convergence of practical concerns does not establish metaphysical agreement. The Buddhist denial of a permanent self, the Jain affirmation of enduring souls, Sāṃkhya dualism, Advaita non-dualism, and Nyāya realism remain substantially different positions. A comparative philosophy must preserve these differences rather than reducing them to a universal doctrine. Its task is to examine the arguments, clarify the assumptions, and assess the strengths and limitations of each position.

The contemporary significance of these traditions lies partly in their sustained examination of attachment, identity, ethical responsibility, attention, and the limits of control. They offer resources for understanding why people may intensify their distress through possessiveness, distorted assumptions, or habitual reactions. They also challenge the view that freedom consists simply in satisfying immediate preferences or securing complete control over external conditions.

Such insights should not be used to dismiss the reality of bodily pain, illness, social injustice, or material deprivation. Nor should liberation be equated automatically with psychological resilience, emotional regulation, or clinical recovery. These phenomena may intersect, but they belong to different conceptual and evidential frameworks. A responsible contemporary interpretation must distinguish philosophical arguments about ultimate freedom from empirical claims about particular practices or therapeutic outcomes.

Ultimately, the comparative study of Indian philosophy suggests that liberation is best approached as a demanding philosophical question rather than as a single technique or universally agreed destination. It requires asking what suffering is, how it arises, what constitutes the person, which forms of knowledge are reliable, how conduct shapes existence, and what it means to be free. The enduring value of these traditions lies both in their proposed answers and in the depth of the questions they continue to make available for critical inquiry.

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