

The Three Fold Path Of Liberation (Moksha) In Indian Philosophies

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Abstract:

Bondage in Indian philosophy means liability of an individual to birth and all the consequent sufferings while liberation (moksha) means complete end of sufferings. Perhaps the biggest thought in man's search for happiness is the thought of liberation. All human beings always struggle for their existence on earth like all other conscious beings. However, the lower beings always struggle almost blindly without any fixed plan and purpose. They are motivated by instinct. On the other hand, man uses his intellect to understand the situations and meaning of that struggle and try to find out the plans and instruments to ensure their success in his life. They wish to lead their life in the light of their knowledge of themselves and the world. Hence, this paper represents an attempt to discuss the philosophical and practical aspects of liberation (Moksha) in the Gita and other Indian philosophies especially with reference to the threefold path which lead to attain liberation (moksha) by individuals.

Keywords: Liberation (Moksha), Hinduism, Sufferings, Citta, Nirvana, Brahman, Reincarnation, Karma, Yoga, Meditation, World, God, Supreme Perfection, Three fold path.

INTRODUCTION

In Indian Philosophy, by the term 'liberation' we mean complete cessation of sufferings. Liberation is a Sanskrit term and it is the central idea in all Indian philosophies. It refers to the ultimate goal of achieving liberation from the cycle of birth and death. The concept of liberation requires someone's state of bondage and anticipates the possibility of his or her release into a state of freedom. It is perhaps the biggest idea in man's quest of happiness in this mortal world.

Human existence in this world is, like that of any conscious being, a continuous struggle for existence. While the lower beings purposelessly and blindly approaching through the existence is more of a struggle. The Superior beings, by using their intellect understand the conditions and significance of life, and plan accordingly. They are guided and motivated by instinct, and in this way they are closer to succeed in their lives. Human life in the worldly dimension is fully incomplete, broken and points beyond itself. It has a goal to attain, purpose and aim to fulfil, and an end to release.

The end of the life takes shelter within the life. The soul of man is always liberated from worldly sufferings. When he is unable to separate his ego or body from his soul, the sufferings, affecting the ego, and also wrongly affect the soul. Therefore, it is always the man of realization who attains liberation. ¹

Indian Philosophical Systems have been divided into two classes namely, the āstika and the nāstika. The nāstika views are those, that do not regard the Vedas as infallible nor do they assume the validity of other knowledge by the Vedas' authority. These principles are three in number; namely Cārvāka, Jains and the Buddhist. The āstika or orthodox systems are six in numbers; namely; Nyāya Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta, generally known as six systems (saddarsana). Each of these Indian Philosophical systems has its unique approach to liberation and we shall now consider, in the

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pages that follow, the position of Indian Philosophical schools on the concept of liberation. First with regard to the Vedas and Upanishads: liberation is the result of knowledge (jñāna).

By real knowledge one is led to liberation. This knowledge is obtained through immediate experience. It is not subject to intellectual knowledge or the determining factors of space, time or causality. This knowledge is the part of identification with higher knowledge through identity. The knowledge of Brahman amounts to being Brahman. It clearly explains to see Brahman everywhere and oneself in all things. The Vedas and Upanishads have approached in theory the nature of liberation and have discovered means of attaining it.

In fact, the Upanishads do not make absolute distinctions between knowledge and activity, philosophy and life. To acquire the knowledge of Brahman is to become Brahman. The Vedas and Upanishads have explained in detail the means to achieve liberation. This includes the ethics of the Veda and Upanishads because liberation is the ultimate end sought by them and self-realization is the only means to liberation. It is true that Upanishads have a lot to say as regards knowledge (Jñāna) as a means to Liberation. “Brachmavid Brahmaiva bhavati”, the knower of Brahman, becomes indeed Brahman.

The Bhagavad Gita identifies liberation (moksha) as the ultimate goal of life. The Bhagavad Gita describes liberation as the realization of one's true nature by letting go of imposed identities. This liberation is viewed as a state that transcends the dualities of good and evil. The Gita presents liberation as an eternal and unbreakable state, free from all suffering, as well as from the cycles of birth and death. In this state, there is no pain; it represents the highest form of perfection.

Liberation is characterized as the transcendental realization of the individual self, the union with God, and an inseparable connection with the divine. According to the Gita, liberation is the ultimate bliss that arises from this union with God. It embodies joy in the self, self-contentment, self-realization, and self-fulfillment, all while being free from moral duties.

The Gita states that a liberated person neither acts nor compels others to act. However, such a person may still contribute to the welfare of humanity without any moral obligations. To achieve this liberation, the Gita outlines a threefold path: Jnana (knowledge), bhakti (devotion), and karma (action). It views liberation as moksha from desires (kama). When we free ourselves from these desires and connect with our true self, we begin to perceive ourselves and the world through a divine lens, recognizing that “All things are in the self, and the self is in all things.”

Indian philosophies have their basis on the doctrine of salvation. Each individual is always being propelled into action with a purpose. Foolish persons are those who undertake no action that bears upon any purpose. Thus, it may be noble, ignoble, or even God, they all have some special (begins from end) aim. That ultimate aim is ‘sukho’ or ‘ānanda’. Negatively, it means cessation of suffering. Now, Cārvākas held that only ‘sukho’ is possible, that is, transient pleasure and often mixed with pain. There is no possibility of everlasting pleasure or cessation of suffering until one is alive. However, other schools conceived this possibility.

Brahmanic philosophy has described it as Liberation (moksha), where there is realization of Brahman. Brahman itself is of the very nature of sat chit and ānanda, which they think is everlasting conscious bliss. On the other hand, according to Buddhism, Ultimate status, is devoid of all suffering and ignorance. They named this teleological goal as Nirvana.

According to Brahdyaranyaka Upanishads the controlling the mind and purifying the citta through yoga prepares one for the realization of Brahman. Penance helps in the purification of the Cittā, Sama, Dama, Uprarati, Titiksā and Samādhi all of which are essential for self-realization. One should practice this six fold yoga; namely, prāṇāyāma, prātyāhara, dhāraṇa, dhyāna and samādhi. As stated in the Upanishads, self-realization is the ultimate goal, as the self represents the true essence of humanity. The self encompasses everything, and the self is all and self is Brahman. While Brahman is the true essence of man, individuals often forget this reality due to avidya. This avidya is in the nature of world. It is beginningless, and to overcome requires sustained efforts and the attainment of knowledge. It is only through knowledge one can achieve liberation and freedom from all sufferings.

Indian philosophical systems recognize the four aims of human activity (purushartha): (Dharma) virtue, (artha) wealth, (Kama) enjoyment and (Moksa) or liberation. Cārvāka also known as Lokayata, presents a materialistic conception of liberation. Of these four purushartha, the Cārvāka rejects artha and Moksa. According to this philosophy, liberation means destruction of all sufferings and it can be obtained only by death and no wise man would intentionally work for that end.

Virtue and vice are distinctions made by scriptures whose authority cannot be rationally accepted. Therefore, neither liberation nor virtue should be our end or ultimate goals. Wealth and enjoyment are the only rational ends that a wise man should strive to achieve. Enjoyment is the ultimate aim, Wealth is merely a means to that enjoyment. They argue that if liberation is defined as the freedom of the soul from its bondage to physical existence, it is absurd because there is no soul. Even if liberation means the attainment of a state free from all pain, it remains an impossible ideal in this life. This complete cessation of suffering can only be equated with death. “Maranam eva apavargah” ²

Existence in the body is related with pleasure as well as pain, so we can only try to minimize pain and enjoy pleasure as much as we can. They viewed pleasure as the highest goal (summum bonum) of Life. Thus, Cārvāka admits that the objective of human life is therefore to attain the greatest amount of pleasure in this life, while avoiding pain as much as possible. If we acknowledge that our existence is confined to our physical bodies and this life, we must see the pleasure derived from our bodily experiences as the greatest good we can attain. We should not throw away the chances of enjoy this life in the vain hope of future enjoyment, as the saying goes, ‘Better a pigeon today than a peacock tomorrow’. ‘A Sure shell (Courie) is better than a doubtful golden coin’. Who is that fool who would entrust the money in hand to the custody of other’s. ³

Cārvāka, also known as Lokayata presents a materialistic view of liberation. This school of thought rejects Artha and Liberation, two of the four purushartha. According to them, death is seen as the only means to achieve liberation, understood as the end of all suffering. If death is the ultimate goal for liberation, then no wise person would strive for that outcome. Consequently, this philosophy argues that the distinction between virtue and vice, as outlined in scriptures, cannot be logically accepted. In this context, liberation is neither a virtue nor a vice. Therefore, they assert that wealth and enjoyment are the only rational pursuits for a wise individual. Cārvāka regard pleasure as the highest aim in life, advocating that the pursuit of maximum pleasure and the avoidance of pain are the ultimate goals – essentially, “better to be a pigeon today that a peacock tomorrow.”

In the Jaina philosophical system, liberation is defined as the escape of jiva from matter, with Karma serving as the link that connects the soul to the body. Ignorance of truth along with the four passions – anger (krodha), greed (lobha), pride (mana) and delusion (maya) are referred to as Kasaya or sticky substances, which attract karmic particles to the soul, binding it through a process known as Asrava or flow. When these particles penetrate the soul and create a bond, this condition is termed bandha, or bondage. In this state, karmic matter intimately intermingles with the soul, similar to how water mixes with milk or how fire interacts with a red-hot iron ball. This explains why we experience life and consciousness throughout our entire body.

By cultivating and practicing right faith, knowledge, and conduct, we can halt the influx of new karma, a state known as Samvara, or the stoppage of karmas. Subsequently, the existing karma must be exhausted, which is referred to as Nirjara or wearing out. Once the last particle of karma is depleted, the connection between the soul and matter is severed, allowing the soul to radiate its true nature of infinite faith, knowledge, bliss, and power. This ultimate state is liberation. The librated should transcend Samsāra and ascends to siddha-shila, the top of the world, where it resides in eternal knowledge and bliss. Thus, bondage signifies the union of the soul with matter, while liberation represents the separation of matter from the soul. As conscious living beings, we find ourselves entangled in karmic matter, and our life’s purpose is to shed this karmic burden and reclaim our intrinsic nature. Therefore, Jainism fundamentally serves as an ethical teaching aimed at the perfection of the soul. Asrava or the flow of matter towards to the soul is the source of liberation, everything else in Jainism is said to be the extension of this fundamental teaching or thought.

Nirvāna, which signifies liberation in Buddhism, represents the ultimate goal of Buddha’s teachings. Nirvāna means the extinction of the self. It also means the extinction of fires of passion. In this state,

the flames of greed, jealousy, anger and doubt are extinguished, along with the impurities of the mind such as sexual desires, ignorance and harmful tendencies. It affects the end of the cycle of re-birth. Nirvāna often has been described as a state of calm or equanimity in which passions and the sorrows they bring are completely subdued. It does not imply the destruction of existence or a state of inactivity. A human being can attain nirvāna in this life which involves the extinguishing of lust, hatred and ignorance. There is sometimes a distinction drawn between two kinds of nirvāna i.e. Upadhisesa and Anupadhisesa. (i) Upadhisesa refers to the state where only human passions are extinguished, while (ii) Anupadhisesa indicates the complete extinction of all beings.

Jaina morality fundamentally revolves around the strict adherence to Pancamahavrtas (panca-mahavratas) which are essential for right conduct. For the achievement of Liberation (Moksha), Jainism outlines a threefold path known as Triratna (Three Jewels). These consist of right faith (Samyag Darsana), right knowledge (Samyag Jnana), and right conduct (Samyag Caritra). While all three are essential for attaining of Liberation (Moksha), Jainism emphasizes the importance of right conduct, as the other two become ineffective without it.

It is found from a practical standpoint, Jainism necessarily encourages a strong belief in the seven principles, which is referred to as right faith. The seven principles are: 1) Soul (Jiva) 2) Non- Soul (Ajiva) 3) Inflow (Asrava) 4) Bondage (Bandha) 5) Checking (Samvara) 6) Shedding (Nirjara) 7) Liberation (Moksha). The first two principles, soul and non-soul, encompass all objects and modifications in the universe. The impure soul contains feelings, perceptions and consciousness, while the body falls under the non-soul category. The principles of inflow and bondage explain the causes of pain, while liberation signifies the cessation of pain. The means to achieve this cessation are found in the principles of checking and shedding. The activities of the mind, body, and speech – whether good or bad – lead to the inflow of karmic matter and result in bondage. To attain liberation, one must remove this bondage through the practices of checking and shedding negative activities. This is the path to achieve Liberation or Moksha. Right knowledge is nothing but acquiring right knowledge about the seven principles stated above.⁴

Right conduct involves abandoning or giving up harmful actions and embracing beneficial ones. The five vows, five carefulness, and three restraints are considered practical conduct by Jina. These five vows are called pancamahavrata: They are non-injury (Ahimsa), truth (Satya), non-stealing (Asteya), chastity (Brahmacarya) and non possession (Aparigraha). The five carefulnesses are called five Samiti and they encompass mindfulness in walking, speaking, eating, handling and disposing of waste. The three restraints, called three Gupti, focus on controlling the mind, body, and speech. These thirteen forms of conduct are primarily for monks, but both householders and monks are expected to adhere to pancamahavratas faithfully. Among these five vows, ahimsa holds a particularly broad significance in Jainism. Ahimsa must be practiced not only through actions but also in thoughts and words. Harboring ill will or speaking harshly to anyone is considered himsa, equating it to cause physical harm. Even coercing someone against their will is viewed as himsa.

Additionally, causing harm through negligence is also classified as himsa. Practicing ahimsa in Jainism can be quite challenging; it requires a form of tapas. At times, Jains may go to great lengths, such as refraining from lighting fires or cooking after sunset, to avoid attracting and potentially harming insects. Thus Jainism in line with Buddhism and Hinduism prescribes virtues aiming to achieve internal purity of the individual to lead him ultimately to Liberation (Moksha). However, social virtues like love and compassion are not neglected rather they are valued in Jainism. The three virtues of mahavratas - non-injury, truthfulness and non-stealing – demonstrate the Jain commitment to ethical living.

According to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thinkers, liberation is defined as freedom of pain. This state of immortality, characterized by the absence of fear and the attainment of bliss, is referred to as Brahman. “Tad abhayam, ajaram, amṛtyupadam brahmoksemaprāptih.”⁵ Liberation is the highest form of happiness, marked by perfect tranquility and freedom from impurities. It does not entail the destruction of the self, but rather the release from bondage. Uddyotakara argues that for the liberated soul to experience everlasting joy, it must also possess an everlasting body, as experiencing requires

a physical mechanism. ⁶ When spiritual text describe the essence of the soul as pleasure they are referring to a state of perfection freedom from pain. ⁷ The Naiyayika asserts that every concept of liberation inherently includes this fundamental aspect of freedom from suffering. In the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika framework, liberation signifies a complete cessation of effort, activity, consciousness, and the absolute separation of the soul from the body and mind. This state of pure existence that liberated souls achieve is likened to deep, dreamless sleep. ⁸ Although this state of abstract existence lacks knowledge and joy, it is considered one of great glory, as the soul embodies the general qualities of Vibhutva or ubiquity, even if it does not possess the specific attributes of knowledge, desire and will. According to Nyāyakās, the ultimate goal of human life is to achieve Mukti, which means liberation from all forms of sorrow and suffering. In the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophy, the term Mukti is specifically used to refer to this liberation. This philosophy aims to provide us with an understanding of reality that leads to the realization of the highest good, or the summum bonum of our lives. Different philosophical systems offer various descriptions of this ultimate state of the soul's existence. For the Nyāyakās, Apavarga, or liberation, represents complete freedom from pain. This suggests a condition where the soul is entirely detached from all bonds, including its connections to the body and the senses. As long as the soul is linked to a physical body, it cannot achieve a state of total freedom from pain. The presence of the body and sense organs inevitably leads to interactions with undesirable and unpleasant experiences, resulting in unavoidable feelings of pain. Therefore, in order to attain liberation, the soul must be unshackled from the constraints of the body and the senses.

In liberation, the soul must be free from the constraints of the body and the senses. Once liberated from the body, the soul no longer experiences pain or pleasure. In fact, it ceases to have any experiences or consciousness at all. Thus, in liberation, the self exists as a pure essence, completely detached from the body, free from suffering, enjoyment, or awareness. Liberation represents the complete negation of pain – not merely a temporary relief, as one might experience during a good sleep or while recovering from a physical or mental ailment. It signifies absolute freedom from pain for all eternity. This state of the soul has been described in various scriptures as ‘freedom from pain’ (Abhayam), freedom from decay and change (Ajaram), freedom from death (Amrtyupadam) and so forth. ⁹ Some latter Naiyayikas, however, argue that liberation is the soul's final escape from pain and attainment of eternal bliss. ¹⁰

According to Vaiśeṣika Philosophy, liberation is a state of happiness that inherently belongs to the self. However, this perspective leads to a contradiction, as the self, by definition, is entirely devoid of consciousness in the state of liberation, making it illogical to claim it possesses any awareness. It is likely due to this issue that the Nyāyakas advanced beyond the Vaiśeṣikas, asserting that there is no transcendental happiness in the state of liberation, as this state cannot be considered pleasurable for that very reason.

According to Nyāya philosophers, liberation is defined as absolute freedom from pain. It represents the ultimate condition of the soul, described in scriptures as ‘freedom from fear (Abhayam), freedom from decay and change (Ajaram), freedom from death’ (Amrtyupadam) among other things. ¹¹ Some later Nyāyakas, however, argue that liberation is the souls final escape from pain and the attainment of eternal bliss. ¹² For this reason the Nyāyakas not only occur with the Vaiśeṣikas in viewing liberation as freedom from suffering, but also diverge from them by asserting that it is also a sense of freedom from happiness. In any case, the Nyāyakas and Vaiśeṣikas can be seen as proponents of liberation as self-realization, in contrast to Buddhism and the Advaita-Vedānta of Śankara, both of which perceive liberation as a state of self annihilation. The Sāmkhya-Yoga agrees with the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika by asserting that liberation, in a negative sense, is freedom from suffering, while in a positive sense, it involves the reaffirmation of the individuality, independence, and autonomy of the self. It shares the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas the view that this understanding of liberation can be achieved through the negation of experience. however, it is crucial to note that Sāmkhya-Yoga differs from the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas in its interpretation of the relationship between experience and the self.

According to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, the self is a substance, with various experiences related to it as qualities, making its bondage, which consists of its empirical life, a real condition. In contrast, the Sāmkhya-Yoga holds that the self is not a substance, but rather the subject of its experience and that

its relationship to these experiences is illusory, akin to the way the surface of water reflects the trees above it. The idea, however, that liberation is an ultimate goal if bondage are illusory and not real as asserted by the Nyāya- Vaiśeṣika and their allies in this respect.

Moreover, the negation of experience, Sāṃkhya-Yoga posits as essential for liberation, should ideally leave the self in a state that, according to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, perspective, is indistinguishable from material objects. However, Sāṃkhya-Yoga attempts to avoid this problematic conclusion by asserting that consciousness is the essence of the self (purusa), positioning the self as fundamentally conscious and distinct from material entities. The challenge here is that consciousness, in its typical understanding, is bipolar and serves as a broad term encompassing various types of experience. Thus denying experience to the self cannot result in a state of consciousness. Consequently, when Sāṃkhya-Yoga views the self and its liberated state as inherently conscious, it interprets consciousness in a transcendental manner without providing a clear rationale for this interpretation.

The only redeeming aspect of the Sāṃkhya-Yoga idea of liberation is its assertion that liberation represents a form of self-realization rather than self-annihilation. Both perspectives agree that liberation can only be achieved through knowledge, as ignorance leads to a bounded ego that is not purusa. The path out of ignorance is knowledge, which is the sole means of attainment. Ignorance, in this context, refers to the inability to recognize one's true nature and the failure to understand the real self. When the jiva recognizes its real nature as Purusa or atman, it becomes influenced by the suffering associated with the ego, intellect, or mind. Liberation can only be achieved by understanding the distinction between prakṛiti and purusa. Attaining liberation means clearly recognizing the self as a reality that transcends time and space, existing beyond the mind and body, and is therefore fundamentally free, eternal, and immortal.¹³

The Sāṃkhya-Yoga philosophers believe in both Jivan mukti and Videhmukti. The Jiva attains freedom upon realizing the truth, even if it must continue living in the body for a while due to past actions. This is similar to a wheel that keeps spinning for a time after the potter has stopped turning it. Likewise, an individual's body persists for some time after liberation is attained because of previous actions. However, the liberated self no longer identifies with the body, even while inhabiting it. As a result, no new actions (karmas) are gathered, and the power of past actions begins to diminish. Complete liberation, or Moksa, is ultimately achieved only after death, at which point there is no longer any connection to the body – this is known as videhamukti. In this state, total liberation (Moksa) from all forms of existence, both subtle and gross, is realized. According to Vijñāna bhikṣu, videhamukti is the only true form of liberation, as the self cannot be entirely free from the effects of bodily and mental changes while still embodied.¹⁴

As long as the body holds the soul, it remains somewhat constrained by mental and physical distortions. According to the Vedānta, liberation is a state of happiness. In contrast, Sāṃkhya, posits that both pain and pleasure are relative and intertwined. Therefore, true happiness cannot be found in liberation; it transcends both pleasure and suffering and exists beyond all qualities. The Yoga system serves as a practical discipline that complements the Sāṃkhya ideal of liberation or kaivalya.

To achieve this, we must remember that neither Jaimini, the founder of the Purva-Mimāṃsā school of philosophy and the author of Mimāṃsā –sutra, nor Sabara, the commentator on the Mimāṃsā –sutra, placed any significance of the idea of liberation. Instead, they emphasized the critical importance of fulfilling the duties outlined in the Vedas to attain happiness in heaven.

According to Mimāṃsā philosophers, the highest good is achieving Heaven or a state of pure bliss. Heaven is typically seen as the ultimate goal of rituals.¹⁵ The destruction of the three fold bondage imposed on the self by the world would clearly lead to the negation of all types of experiences, including cognition, pleasure, pain, desire, aversion, impression, merit and demerit. The inclusion of merit and demerit is particularly important here. This is because if merit and demerit remain, they can lead to rebirth, along with a body and the resulting bondage. Their destruction would end rebirth and the creation of bodies, thus eliminating the possibility of bondage.

Therefore, it is clear that Mimāṃsā denies the possibility of jivan mukti (liberation during life on earth) and supports the doctrine of videhamukti (liberation after death). It was left for Kumarila and

Prabhakara, along with their followers, to address the question of liberation and how to achieve it. Kumarila beings by observed that for liberation is meaningful, it must be eternal; however, anything positive, like happiness in Heaven, is transient. Thus, it should be of a negative nature, resulting from the destruction of the self's connection to the world, which binds it through the body, sense organs, and external objects of experience. It is crucial to understand that Kumarila is referring to the destruction of the self's relationship with the world (Prapanca-Sambandhavilaya) and not, as the Advaita, Vedānta of Śankara, suggests the destruction of the empirical world itself (Prapancavilaya). Both Kumarila and Prabhakara share a common perspective on this matter, with Prabhakara agreeing that liberation, which is complete freedom from the sufferings of empirical life, arises from severing the self's connection with the body. The sense organs cease to function following the destruction of the body, which occurs due to the loss of merits and demerits. In line with this belief, both philosophers further assert that the state of liberation is entirely void lacking not only all empirical experiences, such as pleasure and pain, but also the so-called transcendental consciousness of bliss (ananda) as understood in Vedānta. Therefore, it is evident that Mimāṃsā, similar to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Sāṃkhya-Yoga, admits a purely negative understanding of liberation.

In Yoga Darshan, liberation is defined as samadhi. Shankaracharya describes it as the process of an individual returning to the universal soul, resulting in a merger that leads to the loss of identity and egoism. Similar to Jain Philosophy, Sankhya, also embraces the concept of Kaivalya, with the key distinction being that Purush is considered real. In The Bhagavad Gita, there are three ways of selfless action which lead to Liberation: the path of knowledge (Jñanyog), the path of nishkama karma and the path of grace (Bhakti Yoga).

Liberation or Moksha is a fundamental concept in Hindu Philosophy. For many, liberation or moksa signifies the end of the cycle of birth and rebirth, with knowledge which is the essential means to achieve liberation. In Ramanuj's Vishishtadvaita, philosophy, Moksha is viewed as a union with God. He emphasizes that devotion or Bhakti to God should be practiced consistently, alongside complete self-surrender (prapatti). According to him, it is the individual who fully surrenders to God truly attains freedom from the bondage and suffering of life. Such a person gains a profound knowledge (darshana) of God which is the ultimate path to liberation.

Śankaracārya, the commentator of Brahman Sutra, provides a detailed distinction regarding the nature of liberation. He describes liberation as the transcendental truth – immutable, eternal and all-pervading like space, devoid of all activities and existing eternally. In a state where there is no distribution of self-light, where merits and demerits, cause and effect, the present, the past, and the future are absent, that disembodied state is considered liberation. The liberated self returns to its true form. In this non-dualistic understanding, Moksa is described as the liberation of the self from ignorance (avidya). According to Chitsukhacharya Moksa is nothing but the attainment of unending bliss, it is eternal. The self is eternally liberated and it means that nothing new is gained in liberation, as that would imply it is not eternal.

Śankara believes that gradual liberation is possible. In his commentary on a verse from the Prasnopanisad about focusing on Om, he explains that such concentration leads to Brahma loka where we progressively achieve complete knowledge. Śankara also asserts that worshipping the attributed Isvara purifies one from sins, brings bliss, and facilitates gradual liberation. Even after achieving liberation, the body may persist because it is a result of karmas that have already manifested their effects (Parabdha-karma). However, the liberated soul no longer identifies with the body. The world remains visible to him, but he is not misled by it. He feels no desire for worldly objects and is thus unaffected by the world's suffering. He exists in the world yet remains detached from it. This represents a state of perfection that can be attained in this life. Like Buddha, the Sāṃkhya, the Jaina and other Indian thinkers, Śankara believes that perfection is achievable here and now, rather than being a distant, otherworldly goal to be reached in an uncertain future.

According to Śankara, Moksa does not mean the end of body, but rather the elimination of ignorance. He advocates for liberation while still alive (Jivan mukti).¹⁶ Just as a potter's wheel continues to turn even after the pot is completed, a person continues to live even after achieving liberation, as there is nothing that halts the ongoing flow of life. Śankara illustrates this with the example of a person who

sees two moons due to a defect in their vision; even though they know there is only one moon, they cannot stop perceiving it as two.

Liberation is not about creating something new or purifying an old state; it is about recognizing what has always existed, even during times of bondage, though it may not have been acknowledged then. Liberation represents the unity of the self and Brahman, which is always true, even if it is not always perceived. The Advaitins like the experience of liberation to someone rediscovering a necklace they forgot was around their neck while searching everywhere else. Since bondage stems from illusion, liberation is simply the removal of that illusion. It is not just the absence of suffering that comes from the false sense of separation between the self and the divine. According to the Advaitins, as interpreted from the Upanishads, liberation is a state of positive bliss (ananda) because Brahman embodies bliss, and liberation means becoming one with Brahman.

Conclusion:

Human life in its worldly form feels incomplete, fragmented, and points toward something greater. It has a goal to achieve, a purpose to fulfill, and an end to reach. This goal is not about directly realizing something that has existed eternally but is hidden from our perception. As we have discussed, it involves establishing a society of perfect individuals where the sorrows and sufferings of the world would no longer exist. This is what we refer to as liberation. The liberation of the individual self from the struggles of earthly life cannot be achieved through mere desire, nor is to an abstract ideal reached through speculation. It is a realization that comes from dedicated effort. It demands a strict discipline, a path of sadhana that encompasses moral, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions, along with the necessary mental transformation, spiritual and mental consequent mental on the part of the individual. All Indian philosophical systems, with the exception of Cārvāka, seek liberation as their ultimate goal. Liberation is, in fact, the central focus around which all Indian philosophical thought revolves.

While the interpretations of liberation vary among these systems, they all concur that, negatively speaking, liberation means freedom from all forms of suffering and the end of the cycle of birth and death. Liberation is essentially the realization of inner truth, not something acquired from external sources. They agree that the causes of bondage can be eliminated, allowing the soul to achieve liberation. Once liberated, the soul cannot be bound again. Therefore, the ultimate purpose of human existence is to attain liberation.

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