



MOKSHA AS THE CENTRAL QUESTION OF INDIAN METAPHYSICS: AN EXAMINATION OF DIVERSE SYSTEMS OF THOUGHT

Mayur Patil

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy, Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune

Paper Received On: 12 December 2023

Peer Reviewed On: 28 January 2024

Published On: 01 February 2024

Abstract

Indian philosophical systems are characterized by their multifaceted and intricate nature, and there is no single, universally accepted issue that encompasses them all. Nevertheless, the concept of Moksha is prevalent across all systems, and its resolution shapes the distinct logic of each system. By conducting an extensive analysis of Moksha in all schools of Indian Philosophy, it is evident that each school offers a unique depiction of Moksha, yet they all point to the same ultimate experience. All schools acknowledge the cycle of birth and death as a consequence of bondage, which leads to continuous suffering. The fundamental principles of various systems can be inferred from their perspective on the essence of Moksha, as their view on Moksha serves as the foundation of their logical framework. Consequently, the problem of Moksha emerges as the central and universal inquiry of Indian metaphysics.

Keywords: Moksha, Indian Metaphysics, Diverse Systems of Thought

Introduction: It is widely acknowledged that the Indian systems of thought are diverse and complex, and that there is no single, universally shared issue that defines them all. While some of these systems, such as Samkhya, Yoga, and the Vaisheshika, do address questions about the self, God, causation, substance, and universals, these issues are not central to all of them. Other important issues, such as the problem of creation, cannot be considered central, as they are not addressed by Buddhism and Jainism. Similarly, the problem of substance is not central, as it is not emphasized by the Sankhya and Yoga systems, nor is the nature of reality. These issues do not meet the criteria of being both common and of central metaphysical importance to all systems. In my view, the problem of Moksha meets these criteria, as it is common to all

systems, and its resolution determines the unique logic of each system. Any change in this logic would have a significant impact on the entire metaphysical structure. Therefore, I propose that the problem of Moksha is the central and universal question of Indian metaphysics.

Although all schools of Indian Philosophy emphasize the concept of Moksha, there is the question of whether they are referring to the same experience? Given that Moksha transcends all conceptual understanding, it is difficult not to suspect that these different philosophies may in fact be referring to distinct experiences. It is possible that there are various types of Moksha, but it seems more plausible that different characteristics are emphasized due to the differing metaphysical systems within which Moksha occurs. Let us examine the major schools of Indian philosophy and their perspectives on the concept of moksha.

Jainism is focused on enabling the soul to attain liberation (Moksha) through comprehension and insight of the supreme ideals of ahimsā, satya, asteya, brahmacharya, aparigraha and the philosophy of non-absolutism (Anekāntvād). Jainism teaches that the soul is bound by karma since time immemorial and is oblivious to its true nature, causing it to move from one life cycle to another while accumulating new karma. The path to liberation from these sufferings is through reason and rationality. By following the principles of Samyak-darshan, Samyak-jñān, and Samyak-chāritra, one can release oneself from the cycle of karma and achieve liberation. As per the teachings of Umasvami, Moksha signifies the absolute and complete freedom from all forms of Karmic-matter, which includes the removal of the root cause of bondage and the relinquishment of all karmas. The influx of Karma-particles into the Soul, known as Asrava, is primarily attributed to the actions of the body, speech, and mind. Stoppage of Asrava is essential for achieving Moksha. However, it is not enough to just stop the fresh-flow of karma-particles; we also need to dissipate the old ones. Thus, Samvara, which means controlling, arrests the fresh-flow of karma-particles but does not dissipate the old ones. The ability to achieve Nirjara, or the shedding and dissipation of karmic particles, is facilitated by austerities, as described by Umasvami in his definition of Moksa. He used the prefixes VI (Visesarupena) and PRA (Prakrstarupena) to emphasize that Moksha entails the complete and exhaustive dissolution of all karmic particles, which is the prerequisite for attaining omniscience.

The Jaina concept of Moksa is based on the Doctrine of Four-fold Infinities of the Soul, which posits that the Soul possesses four infinities inherently, which are obscured by the veil of four destructive Karmas. In conclusion, the concept of Moksa in Jainism is a rediscovery of

oneself through self-realization and the liberation of the soul from the cycle of karma and attaining eternal bliss.

In Buddhism, the concept of liberation is referred to as Nirvana, which is considered the ultimate objective of the Theravada-Buddhist path. In the Mahayana tradition, Nirvana is viewed as a secondary outcome of achieving complete enlightenment as a Samyaksambuddha. Nirvana, or "going out" and achieving complete nothingness, is often compared to the extinguishing of a lamp's flame when the oil is consumed. It involves the cessation of one's desires and passions, leading to the dissolution of suffering, as per Buddha's third and fourth noble truths.

According to the teachings of the Buddha, nirvana represents the cessation of the cycle of births and rebirths, resulting in a state of non-existence or nothingness. This differs from some scholars' interpretation of it as annihilation. In the Theravada tradition, nirvana is characterized as a state of perfect peace, while in the Mahayana tradition, it is described as a state of perfect bliss. The Upanishads used adjectives to describe the pure self (Atman), which Buddha applied to nirvana. Both Atman and nirvana are beyond the reach of the senses and intellect and are considered unelectable. The negation of Atman and nirvana is achieved through negative terms, with "neti-neti" negating matters related to Atman and negative terms negating matters related to nirvana. The ultimate goal of Buddhism is universal salvation, as exemplified by the Buddha's teachings to preach for the well-being of all and shower compassion on the world. Avidya, or false knowledge, is considered the root cause of suffering, and the means to obtain nirvana is by ceasing the cycle of births and rebirths caused by avidya. Nirvana is a concept that has long been a topic of discussion in Buddhist philosophy, and it is perhaps one of the most challenging issues to comprehend due to the Buddha's refusal to speculate about it. His approach was that attaining nirvana was the only way to understand its true nature. However, it is evident that nirvana does not involve the existence of a pure consciousness because such a concept does not exist in early Buddhism. Instead, Buddhism asserts that there is no self, and that our perception of self is merely an illusion created by the interaction of five skandhas, or elements. The Buddha emphasized that we should not identify anything as the self. Nirvana, therefore, can be seen as the realization that there is no self.

In the Samkhya philosophy, the notion of salvation is considered to be merely superficial as bondage does not have any connection with the Purusha. Both bondage and liberation are related to the coming together and separation of Purusha and Prakriti, which arise due to a lack of discrimination and discrimination. Prakriti does not have the power to restrict

the Purusha; instead, it takes on various forms. Kapila, the founder of Samkhya, was a realist and scholar. In his first aphorism, he posits that "the complete cessation of pain is the complete goal of man." He refutes the notion of alleviating suffering through physical means and rejects the views of others on the subject.

To effectively understand the concept of moksha within the framework of Samkhya philosophy, it is necessary to understand that the Samkhya system is grounded in the idea of an evolutionary theory of matter, with origins in primordial matter. In this process of evolution, Prakriti undergoes transformation and differentiation, ultimately giving rise to a multitude of objects. The cycle of evolution is subsequently followed by dissolution, during which all physical objects are merge back into Prakriti, reverting to its original, undifferentiated state as the primordial substance. This recurring cycle of evolution and dissolution lays the foundation for the concept of mukti, which is the ultimate stage of evolution according to Sankhya. The Samkhya system posits that Prakriti serves as the source of the realm of becoming.

Philosophy of Moksha, which is based on the principle of causality, argues that primal Nature is the fundamental material cause of all physical creation. This belief is in line with the Sankhya's theory of cause and effect, known as Satkaarya-vaada, which asserts that nothing can be created out of or destroyed into nothingness. Instead, all evolution is a process of transformation where primal Nature changes from one form to another. The evolution of matter is determined by changes in the relative strengths of the attributes. When the spirit realizes its distinctness from primal Nature, evolution ceases, thereby frustrating the purpose of Prakriti evolving for Purusha. This raises the question of why jivanmukta, who has attained moksha, must continue to suffer the consequences of his past deeds. The author of the Sankhya Karika explains that just as a potter's wheel continues to move after the pot has been completed and eventually stops due to its previous momentum, so too does the cycle of suffering continue after moksha has been attained and eventually ceases on its own. In the Samkhya philosophy, the complete cessation of suffering is considered the ultimate goal of moksha.

Jatyantara Parinama, as described by Patanjali, involves the transformation of one species or genus into another species or genus. The origin of suffering and ignorance can be traced back to matter, and Yoga seeks to free the soul from all physical and sensory attachments in order to achieve supreme enlightenment and salvation within a single lifetime, while also atoning for past transgressions. This enlightenment cannot be achieved instantly; rather, it is a gradual process that requires patience, discipline, and a deep understanding of each stage. Patanjali outlines eight stages of Yoga, including Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama,

Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi. Patanjali states that the cessation of avidya, or ignorance, is equivalent to moksha or kevalya. Through the purusharth, or efforts of man, the qualities of satva, rajas, and tamas become nil, meaning they return to their original state of purity. According to Patanjali, the state of kaivalya, or absolute independence, is the eternal life of purusha when it is freed from prakriti. This state is not merely a negation, but rather a state of ultimate freedom from worldly affairs. In this state, the individual remains untouched by worldly affairs and attains a level of true knowledge that destroys the root cause of bondage, avidya. With the acquisition of true knowledge, all false notions disappear, and the individual is liberated from the cycle of birth and death.

In the field of yoga philosophy, the concept of jivan mukta is also examined. A disciple who has attained Samadhi remains conscious and knowledgeable about the path to liberation. However, they proceed to surpass this knowledge and enter a state of perpetual sleep, where they become unaware of both the world and their own existence. Despite this, the Purusha maintains its unobstructed radiance. At this concluding stage, all bodily functions cease, and the spirit returns to its true nature, transforming the disciple into a jivanmukta. In this state, the sage must confront the ripened fruits of their past actions, both virtuous and sinful, as a result of achieving true knowledge while still enduring the consequences of their karma. This is referred to as tisthati samsakaravasat akraivaddhrtasarah. In the practice of Yoga, true liberation is attained by entirely separating the self from all material elements. This can only be accomplished by halting the highest material principle, including the mind, body, and intellect, thereby allowing for the realization of complete isolation and the redirection of consciousness.

In the philosophy of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, the concept of Mokṣa is referred to as Apavarga. In line with the principles of Nyāya philosophy, the soul is inherently formless and inactive, and consciousness is not considered an eternal or innate attribute of the soul. Rather, it is a non-eternal and accidental characteristic of the self. The emergence of consciousness is believed to occur when the self is connected with the mind, which in turn is connected with the senses, and the senses are connected with external objects. The self is seen to identify with the body, mind, and senses due to Avidyā or Ajñāna, leading to various forms of suffering. Avidyā or Ajñāna is considered to be the root cause of such suffering. The attainment of liberation can be achieved by possessing the right knowledge of the sixteen categories (tattvajñāna). The Naiyāikas recognized twelve prameyas, which are objects of true knowledge or reality. These include Ātma, Śarīra, Indriya, Artha, Buddhi, Manas, Pravrtri, Dosa, Pretyabhāva, Phala,

Duhkha, and Apavarga. This list is not exhaustive, but it highlights the knowledge areas important for liberation.

According to Nyaya philosophy, the soul's liberation is devoid of both merits and demerits, leading to a state of freedom from pleasure and pain. Error is seen as the cause of pain, and the goal of man is to eradicate it. Moksha, in Nyaya philosophy, is not the destruction of the self, but rather the liberation from bondage. Nyaya philosophy does not accept the idea of joy (anand) in the state of liberation. Instead, liberation is defined as the cessation of pain. Radhakrishnan, in his commentary on the Nyaya view of moksha, stated that pleasure is always tainted with pain, and therefore, liberation is not about the enjoyment of positive pleasure. According to Uddhgotakara, a commentator on the Nyaya Sutra, for the released soul to have an eternal body, the bodily mechanism must exist. Consequently, mukti is not a state of pure knowledge or bliss, but rather a state of perfect qualitylessness in which the self remains in its own purity, unencumbered by any external influences.

According to the Vaiseshika philosophy, the ultimate goal of liberation is the permanent cessation of all Gunas, or qualities, which include buddhi, sukha, dukha, iccha, dvesha, prayatna, dharma, adharma, and sanskara. These Gunas arise due to the contact between the atma and manas. When the mind is separated from the atma, the Gunas dissolve, and this is known as Moksha. This can be achieved through the performance of satkarma, sravana, manana, and other spiritual practices. Similarly, in the Vaiseshika and Nyay schools, the concept of Moksha is similar. Vaiseshika philosophy holds that the Self becomes aware of objects when it is joined with the body. Liberation is achievable only when the soul is free from the qualities that arise from contact with name and form. This is referred to as Moksha, which entails the complete annihilation of the nine specific qualities of the Self. To avert the argument that Moksha resembles the unconscious state of a stone, the Vaiseshika school of thought proposes the concept of Inherent Felicity in the state of Moksha.

Later Mimamsakas believe in the concept of liberation, known as apavarga. According to Prabhakara and Kumarila, the ultimate goal of human life is liberation, which is achieved through the complete cessation of painful experiences. The state of liberation is characterized by the absence of pleasure and pain, as consciousness is seen as an unessential quality of the Soul. The Soul is eternal and does not perish with the body; instead, it passes from one life to another. According to Prabhakara, the perception of the Self can only be achieved through mental cognition, and during the attainment of salvation, the Self remains in a state of pure potential as the power of knowledge without any actual manifestation or expression.

Prabhakara holds the view that Moksha, or liberation, is the realization of the Moral Imperative as a duty (Niyoga-siddhi). The followers of Prabhakara assert that the realization of the Moral Imperative as a duty (Niyoga-siddhi) is essential for achieving Moksha.

Kumarila saw Moksha as the "Soul's experience of its own intrinsic happiness with complete cessation of all kinds of misery," which aligns with the Advaitic conception. The Bhattas typically hold the view that Moksha is the attainment of inherent joy (atmasaukhyanubhuti). According to Parthasarathi Misra and Gagabhatta, the notion that Mukti signifies liberation from pain and suffering is inaccurate. Narayanabhatta, Bhattaservajna, and Sucaritra Misra concur that the state of Mukti is characterized by happiness, as they maintain that the Soul, while in a state of embodied existence, is consciousness afflicted with ignorance (Ajnanopitacaitanyatmavada). To achieve Moksha, one must experience the fruits of their good and bad actions, exhaust them, and stop the generation of new effects by refraining from performing karmya-karmas (sacrifices performed for specific beneficial results) and assiduously performing nitya-karmas (daily duties). This state is characterized by the dissolution of the body and the non-production of any further body or rebirth. While Jaimini and Sabara emphasized the path to a life in heaven, they did not focus on achieving freedom from samsara.

According to Prabhakara, liberation signifies the definitive eradication of both dharma and adharma, which propel the cycle of rebirth. This state is characterized by the utter dissolution of the physical form, consequent to the annihilation of all dharmic and adharmic tendencies. In samsara, individuals experience a mixture of pleasures and pain, leading them to seek liberation. Merely possessing knowledge is insufficient for attaining freedom from bondage; it can only be achieved through the exhaustion of action. According to Kumarila, moksha is a desirable state that signifies the realization of the Atman, which is comparable to the Advaita perspective. He maintains that merely possessing knowledge is insufficient for attaining liberation, and that a combination of karma and jnana is necessary for release.

Based on the teachings of Advaita tradition, achieving moksha involves dispelling avidya or ignorance regarding our misidentification with the five koshas. This results in the recognition that the perceivable world is unreal and transitory, and that atman or consciousness is the only enduring reality. The concept of Moksha is often regarded as a liberation from the illusory nature of reality and the realization of one's true essence, which is known as Satcitananda. According to Advaita philosophy, Atman, Brahman, and Paramatman are all

identical and represent the formless, attribute-less Brahman that transcends the duality of existence and non-existence, tangibility, and comprehension.

Advaita Vedanta places significant importance on Jnana Yoga as the ultimate means of attaining moksha, or liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Other yogas, such as Bhakti Yoga, are seen as a means to acquiring knowledge that leads to moksha. Shankar's Advaita Vedanta philosophy provides a theory on the concepts of maya, or illusion, and adhyas, or superimposition. According to this philosophy, the world is a superimposition of Brahman, and not a real entity. The world is regarded as an illusion, while the unchanging Brahman is seen as the true reality. Maya or avidhya, or false knowledge, is the cause of the jiva, or individual soul, becoming bound to the cycle of birth and death. The pure soul or Atman is mixed with avidhya in an imperceptible way, and the jiva believes that the mind and other objects are part of its own self. The jiva does not separate itself from these illusions and does not recognize its true nature.

Shankar believed that moksha, or the realization of one's true form, is achieved by directly realizing something that has always existed but is hidden from our view due to avidya or maya. This realization results in the removal of limitations and the soul's liberation. In Shankar's philosophy, avidya is the cause of bondage, although it is not eternal. With true knowledge, avidya disappears, and one attains moksha, which is not a separate state but rather the realization of one's own form. Radhakrishnan, commenting on Shankar's view, wrote that moksha is a matter of directly realizing something that has existed eternally but is hidden from our view.

The central tenet of Ramanuja's Vishistadvaita philosophy is that Brahman constitutes the very essence of all beings, and in order to attain liberation, one must relinquish their will to the Lord. The ultimate objective, known as Moksha, is described as an eternal, loving union with God (Vishnu). Ramanuja posits that actions should be performed without any personal motives, solely to satisfy God. By engaging in such actions, the soul will eventually realize that this approach is insufficient for attaining liberation. Consequently, the soul will then turn to the study of Jnanakanda, or Vedanta, which delves into the nature of God, soul, and matter. Through this study, the soul will come to understand that both matter and souls embody God, who is the inner ruler and the true essence of the soul. Ramanuja believes that knowledge is the primary cause of liberation, but this knowledge is not ordinary verbal knowledge. Ramanuja identifies the true knowledge with the highest devotion, which is obtained through prapatti or

self-surrender and constant remembrance of God as the sole object of devotion. This remembrance is also known as pure meditation or concentrated contemplation.

Ramanuja believed that the ordinary practices of bhakti, such as prapatti and upasana, serve as a means to attain the highest form of bhakti, which is pure jnana or immediate intuitive knowledge of God. This knowledge is the direct cause of liberation and can only be achieved through the grace of God. According to Ramanuja, salvation involves the release of the soul from the barriers that limit it, rather than its disappearance. The real self cannot be destroyed, as it is one substance that cannot pass into another. The released soul attains the nature of God, but not identity with Him. It is ego, not individuality, that is the enemy of salvation. Ramanuja did not believe in Jivanmukti, as the soul must exhaust all karma and shed the physical body before attaining fellowship with God.

Through a comprehensive examination of the concept of moksha across all schools of Indian Philosophy, it is evident that each school presents a distinct representation of moksha, yet all are referring to the same ultimate experience. Despite the diverse nature of these representations, it may be inferred that they are fundamentally referring to the same underlying concept. The objective of each school is critical in reaching this conclusion, as each asserts that the ultimate goal of man is to achieve moksha. Furthermore, all schools recognize the cycle of birth and death as a result of bondage, which leads to continuous suffering. According to these schools, the root cause of this bondage is avidya, or ignorance.

Our examination of the metaphysical perspectives of the Indian systems reveals two key points. Firstly, all the different systems can be fully grasped under the four possible views concerning Moksha, and thus, the question of Moksha is common to each of them. Secondly, the main tenets of the various systems can be deduced from their stance on the nature of Moksha, as their view on Moksha serves as the foundation of their logic, and thus, it can be considered the pivot of the system. Hence, we assert that the problem of Moksha is the central concern of Indian metaphysics.

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Cite Your Article as:

Mayur Patil. (2024). MOKSHA AS THE CENTRAL QUESTION OF INDIAN METAPHYSICS: AN EXAMINATION OF DIVERSE SYSTEMS OF THOUGHT. *Scholarly Research Journal for Humanity Science & English Language*, 12(61), 59–67. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10623053>