



## Unifying Indian Philosophical Traditions through the Concept of Liberation (Mokṣa): A Comparative Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

Except for the materialist Cārvāka school, all major systems of Indian philosophy converge on the foundational premise that human existence is pervaded by suffering (duḥkha), and that the ultimate aim of human endeavor is liberation (mokṣa) from this condition. While individual schools—such as Buddhism, Jainism, Sāṃkhya, and Yoga—conceptualize liberation through distinct terminology (Nirvāṇa, Kevala-jñāna, Kaivalya) and prescribe unique methodological paths, this paper argues that these divergent models share a structural and semantic essence. By critically examining the definitions of bondage and suffering across these traditions, this study addresses the implicit dialectical tension or 'egoistic stance' within distinct philosophical identities. Utilizing a comparative-analytical framework grounded in Vedāntic metaphysics, this article demonstrates that removing structural exclusivity reveals a unified conceptual boundary (mokṣa as an unconditioned state), thereby establishing a cohesive framework across classical Indian philosophy.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In classical Indian metaphysics, liberation (mokṣa or mukti) stands as the highest purpose of human life (parama-puruṣārtha). With the notable exception of the materialist Cārvāka school, every major system acknowledges two foundational existential realities: bondage (bandhana) and liberation (mokṣa).

Etymologically and conceptually, bondage presupposes a relational duality—a binding mechanism between two entities. Across different schools, the constituents of this relational duality vary:

- **Sāṃkhya-Yoga:** Non-discrimination (aviveka) between Spirit (Puruṣa) and Nature (Prakṛti).
- **Jainism:** The association of karmic matter (puḍgala) with the consciousness (jīva).
- **Buddhism:** The cycle of dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda) driven by ignorance (avidyā) and craving (tṛṣṇā).

Despite utilizing distinct nomenclatures—Nirvāṇa in Buddhism, Kevala-jñāna in Jainism, and Kaivalya in Sāṃkhya-Yoga—an analytical examination reveals that these terms signify a functionally equivalent state: complete, permanent cessation of suffering. This paper explores why these schools developed distinct terminological frameworks despite sharing an ultimate objective, and proposes a unified paradigm by integrating these perspectives through Vedāntic meta-critique.

## 2. THE METAPHYSICAL FOUNDATION: CONCEPTIONS OF SUFFERING (DUḤKHA) AND BONDAGE

To understand liberation, one must first examine the diagnostic formulation of suffering across the four traditions.

### 2.1 Buddhism

Gautama Buddha's foundational axiom, sarvaṃ duḥkham ("all is suffering"), underscores the pervasive nature of existence within Saṃsāra. As articulated in the theory of Dependent Origination (Pratītyasamutpāda), suffering is not accidental but causally conditioned by a twelve-linked chain (dvādaśānidāna) originating in ignorance (avidyā). Transitory pleasures are deceptive; due to ignorance, worldly beings mistake fleeting sensations for enduring happiness, thereby deepening their entanglements in desire and sorrow.



## 2.2 Jainism

Jainism presents a realistic and dualistic account of bondage. Bondage occurs when karmic particles (pudgala) infiltrate the soul (jīva). The process initiates with subjective or mental dispositions (bhāva-karma), which attract physical karmic matter (dravya-karma) through āsrava (influx). This interaction forms a subtle material envelope around the soul, obstructing its intrinsic attributes of infinite knowledge (ananta-jñāna) and infinite perception (ananta-darśana).

## 2.3 Sāṃkhya Philosophy

Sāṃkhya identifies three forms of suffering (duḥkhatraya):

- Ādhyātmika (intrinsic/internal),
- Ādhibhautika (extrinsic/physical), and
- Ādhidaivika (supernatural/metaphysical).

Sāṃkhya asserts that suffering is not an inherent attribute of Pure Consciousness (Puruṣa). Rather, it arises from non-discrimination (aviveka) between Puruṣa and unmanifest material nature (Prakṛti). When Puruṣa falsely identifies with the intellect (buddhi) and the modifications of Prakṛti, the experience of suffering occurs.

## 2.4 Yoga Philosophy

Aligning closely with Sāṃkhya metaphysics, Yoga attributes suffering to the affliction of ignorance (avidyā) and mental modifications (citta-vṛtti). The quality of sattva within the intellect, when clouded by tamas and activated by rajas, leads Puruṣa to misapprehend the attributes of Prakṛti as its own. This false identification binds the self to experiential suffering.

## 3. PATHS TO LIBERATION: TERMINOLOGY AND ETYMOLOGY

### 3.1 Structural Pathways to Freedom

|          |                      |                                     |                                                  |
|----------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Buddhism | Nirvāṇa              | Ignorance (Avidyā) & Desire (Tṛṣṇā) | Noble Eightfold Path (Aṣṭāṅgika Mārga) & Samādhi |
| Jainism  | Kevala-jñāna / Mukti | Influx of Karmic Matter (Pudgala)   | Three Jewels (Triratna), Saṃvara, & Nirjarā      |
| Sāṃkhya  | Kaivalya             | Non-discrimination (Aviveka)        | Discriminative Knowledge (Viveka-                |



|      |          |                                    |                                                        |
|------|----------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
|      |          |                                    | jñāna)                                                 |
| Yoga | Kaivalya | Afflictions (Kleśas) & Citta-vṛtti | Eight Limbs of Yoga (Aṣṭāṅga Yoga) & Īśvara-praṇidhāna |

### 3.2 Etymological Analysis

- **Nirvāṇa (Buddhism):** Derived from nir (out/extinction) and vā (to blow). It signifies the absolute extinguishing of the fires of desire, attachment, and illusion, allowing the individual to distinguish between fleeting pleasures and true transcendence.
- **Kevala-jñāna (Jainism):** Derived from kevala (solitary/pure) and jñāna (knowledge). It denotes absolute, isolated omniscience attained when the soul (jīva) completely dissociates from physical karmic matter (pudgala).
- **Kaivalya (Sāṃkhya-Yoga):** Rooted in kevala (aloneness). It represents the state of absolute isolation and independence of Puruṣa from Prakṛti, where consciousness abides purely in its own true nature, free from the three guṇas.

## 4. CRITICAL PROBLEM STATEMENT: STRUCTURAL EXCLUSIVITY AND EGOISTIC FRAMING

The critical problematization of this study lies in the historical divergence among these systems. While each school defines liberation as an unconditioned state free from dualistic entanglement, the formalization of their doctrines often introduces a structural contradiction:

- **Systemic Exclusivity (Siddhāntika-Ahaṃkāra):** In asserting the absolute validity of their respective terminologies (Nirvāṇa vs. Kaivalya vs. Apavarga), classical schools often constructed rigid boundaries.
- **The Paradox of Definition:** True liberation is defined as a state entirely free from relational limitations (bandhana). However, when a philosophy insists that only its specific conceptual framework captures this state, it imposes a new conceptual boundary.

Thus, the sectarian polemics between traditions reflect an "egoistic entity" or dogmatic commitment at the philosophical level. To realize the universal core of mokṣa, these rigid terminological divisions must be reconciled.

## 5. COMPARATIVE SYNTHESIS AND OBJECTIVE: A VEDĀNTIC RESOLUTION



To resolve this conceptual impasse, this paper adopts the integrative perspective of Advaita Vedānta. In Vedāntic metaphysics, liberation (mokṣa) is not the production of a new state, but the removal of ignorance (avidyā-nivṛtti) and the realization of one's inherent, unconditioned identity (Brahman/Ātman).

Vedānta posits that true liberation transcends all individualistic or sectarian ego-structures (ahaṁkāra). As long as a system maintains intellectual exclusivity, it remains within the realm of conceptual dualism.

By synthesizing the core insights of these traditions:

- The Buddhist cessation of desire (Nirvāṇa),
- The Jaina purification of consciousness (Kevala-jñāna), and
- The Sāṁkhya-Yoga isolation of pure consciousness (Kaivalya),

we observe that all these paths describe the same ontological destination: the dissolution of illusory bondage and the restoration of unconditioned freedom. The apparent differences lie in methodology and linguistic framing, not in the ultimate reality of liberation itself.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the diversity of terminology across Indian philosophical traditions does not signify contradictory ultimate realities. Whether termed Nirvāṇa, Kevala-jñāna, or Kaivalya, liberation consistently represents an absolute release from the causal framework of suffering. By contextualizing these diverse paths through a Vedāntic lens, we can strip away sectarian biases and establish a unified boundary—one that recognizes all classical Indian paths as complementary perspectives on the singular human quest for spiritual emancipation.

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