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# The Concept Of Liberation (Moksa) In The Orthodox And The Heterodox Schools Of Indian Philosophy: A Review

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## Abstract

This review explores the meaning of Moksa (liberation) as it is conceived in both orthodox and heterodox Indian schools of philosophy. Moksa is the ultimate spiritual objective, representing liberation from the cycle of samsara (birth, death, and rebirth) and the achievement of spiritual liberation. The study discusses the meanings of Moksa in different schools of philosophy, both orthodox like Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, and Vedanta, and heterodox such as Buddhism, Jainism, and Cārvāka. Each school propounds a specific view of what liberation is, with the orthodox schools laying particular stress on self-realization, knowledge, and union with God, and the heterodox schools on the abandonment of suffering, destruction of karma, and extinguishing of desire. The investigation offers a comparative examination of the views, how Moksa is associated with ethical behavior, meditation, asceticism, devotion, and wisdom. By examining the philosophical foundations and practices to Moksa, the research provides an in-depth study of how various Indian philosophical traditions conceive of liberation, noting the diverse methods of achieving spiritual freedom and ultimately, transcendence.

**Keywords:** Moksa, Liberation, Indian Philosophy, Samsara, Orthodox Schools, Heterodox Schools.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Moksa, alternatively referred to as vimoksa, vimukti, and mukti, is a fundamental concept in Indian philosophy that signifies liberation or emancipation from rebirth, death, and birth (samsara). It is a central goal in Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, and Sikh spiritual traditions, where it signifies final freedom from worldly suffering and the realization of the spiritual. In some schools of philosophy, Moksa represents attainment of the true nature of the self, the removal of ignorance, and the realization of a state of blissful freedom of being (Oman, et al., 2018).

The conception of Moksa differs across orthodox and heterodox schools of Indian philosophy. The orthodox schools, including Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, and Vedanta, describe Moksa as the soul's liberation through knowledge, virtuous conduct, and self-realization. Conversely, the heterodox schools such as Buddhism, Jainism, and Cārvāka view Moksa differently, emphasizing the end of suffering, the elimination of karma, and the final peace that is achieved through non-attachment or freedom from worldly desires (Hiltebeitel, 2017). This review discusses these various views of Moksa, noting the philosophical subtleties and spiritual disciplines that result in liberation in orthodox and heterodox traditions.

### 1.1. Meaning of the Word Mokṣa:

The terms Mokṣa and Mukti come from the root mucṣ (mokṣaṇe) that signifies to release, to discharge, to let go, or from the root muc (pramocane modane ca) that signifies to release, to discharge, to let go, and to rejoice. In philosophy these terms convey the sense of liberation from pains and experiencing a state of bliss. Spiritual frameworks provide stronger suggestions to what freedom means (Pereverzev, 2016). It is there the eternal liberty from the rebirth cycle resulting in the absolute freedom from worldly pains and pleasures of any form. Mokṣa is also achieved in the discovery of the ecstatic status of the self. Thus there are two sides to the concept of Mokṣa, loss and gain. The negative aspect is the end of the cycle of birth and death with all sorts of pains, and the positive aspect is the achievement of oneness with the ultimate reality and the experience of bliss. As per the Upaniṣads it is the supreme value, on understanding which nothing further is to be understood. It is the experience of bliss which is well beyond our description. It is the state of relishing omniscience and omnipresence. Pratyabhijñā concurs with it as well.

### 1.2. Objectives of the Study:

- To examine how both orthodox and non-orthodox indian ideologies use the idea of Moksa.
- To evaluate how different indian systems of thought perceive Moksa.
- To investigate how self-realization, ethics, and meditation contribute to achieving Moksa.

## 2. MOKSA IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY: AN OVERVIEW

Moksa, which comes from the Sanskrit word muc, meaning "to free" or "to release," is the emancipation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (samsara). It represents the supreme aim of human life in several Indian philosophical and religious schools of thought (McNamara, 2023). In Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, Moksa is a state of spiritual liberation and final realization. It is attained through the destruction of ignorance and the elimination of worldly misery.

### Concept of Moksa in Various Indian Philosophies:

1. **Hinduism:** Attaining non-duality between the individual self (Atman) and Supreme Reality (Brahman) is viewed by various schools of Hindu philosophy, including Advaita Vedanta and Śāṅkara's teachings, as Moksa, the highest goal of human life and the realization of the four Puruṣārthas—Dharma (duty), Artha (wealth), Kāma (pleasure), and Moksa (liberation). Attainment leads to the destruction of the wheel of samsara and attainment of eternal peace and liberation.
2. **Buddhism:** In Buddhism, Moksa is identified as Nirvāṇa, the eradication of dukkha or suffering and of samsara (Gómez, 2013). Achieving Nirvāṇa requires understanding and adhering to the Eightfold Path, which includes having the correct perspective, thoughts, speech, actions, living, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. Ignorance is the root cause of all suffering; so, liberation is derived by eliminating ignorance (Avidyā).

3. **Jainism:** The concept of liberation, or Moksa, in Jainism refers to the release of the soul from the cycle of rebirth. To get there, one must purge their karma by purifying themselves via the practice of righteous knowledge, faith, and deeds. The Jain path to enlightenment centers on asceticism and nonviolence (ahimsa).
4. **Sikhism:** In Sikhism, Moksa is achieved by devotion to the single God, a life of service, and selflessness. Sikh beliefs focus on meditation on God's name (Naam Simran) and adhering to the Guru's teachings.

**Table 1:** Reference Table

Author(s)	Study Focus	Method	Findings/Results	Relevance
<b>(Bilimoria, 2007)</b>	Dismantling Normativity in Indian Ethics, Vedic to Gita's Alterity	Philosophical analysis and textual review	Explores the evolution of ethical thought in Indian philosophy, with a focus on the ethical dimension of Moksa in the Vedic and Gita contexts.	The Ethical Dimension of Moksa in Vedic and Gita Thought
<b>(Batabyal, 2023)</b>	Swami Vivekananda's Concept of Liberation	Interpretive analysis of Vivekananda's writings	Analyzes Vivekananda's vision of Moksa as freedom through self-realization and spiritual practices.	Swami Vivekananda's Liberation and Moksa
<b>(Moise, 2019)</b>	Salvation and Perfection in Indian Philosophy, focusing on Vaiśeṣika	Philosophical analysis, comparative study	Investigates how Moksa is conceptualized in the Vaiśeṣika school and its implications for spiritual liberation.	Vaiśeṣika and the Concept of Moksa
<b>(Chakraborty, 2015)</b>	Purusarthas and Crisis of Values in Modern Society	Theoretical analysis of the four aims of life	Discusses the crisis of values in modern society and how the purusarthas, particularly Moksa, can address these crises.	The Purusarthas and Crisis of Values
<b>(Bartley, 2015)</b>	Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist ideas on Moksa	Textual analysis of Hindu and Buddhist texts	Provides an introductory overview of Moksa in Hinduism and	Moksa in Hinduism and Buddhism: A

			Buddhism, emphasizing their philosophical differences and approaches to liberation.	Comparative Overview
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### **Pathways to Moksa:**

Each school of philosophy prescribes different ways to achieve Moksa:

- **Yoga and Meditation:** Yoga, particularly the traditions of Bhakti (devotion), Jnana (knowledge), and Karma (selfless action), holds a prime importance in gaining Moksa or liberation in many traditions. Meditating and maintaining mindfulness aids in cleansing the mind and attaining the real nature of the self.



**Figure 1:** Yoga and Meditation (Acri, 2022)

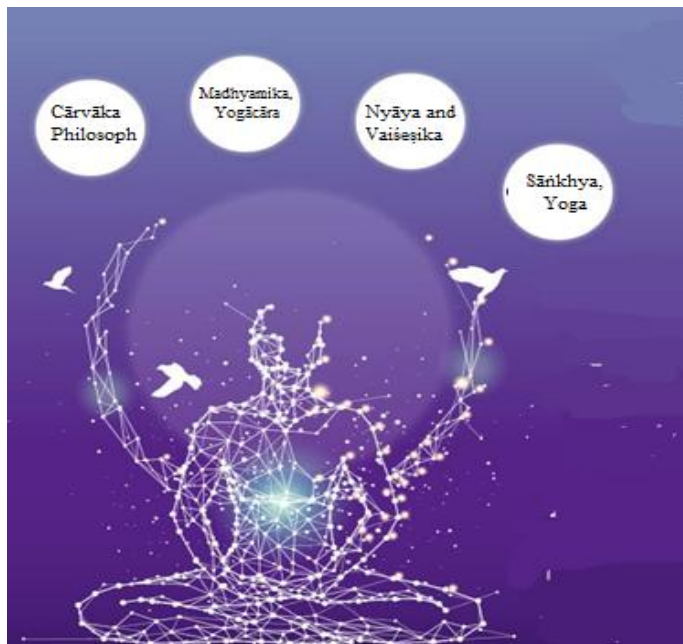
- **Bhakti (Devotion):** In devotional faiths such as in Vaishnavism and Bhakti yoga, Moksa is realized through devotion and love for the Supreme God. It is a path of surrender to divine will.
- **Ethical Living:** The living of Dharma, such as the fulfillment of moral obligations and ethical conduct, is crucial in most traditions. Purification of the mind, emotions, and intellect is needed for liberation.

### **3. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF MOKSA:**

Moksa's idea developed through time in Indian philosophy. In the early Upanishads, the word mucyate (liberty) was employed, and Moksa started to take shape as a central theme. By the middle Upanishads, including the Katha and Svetasvatara Upanishads, Moksa was a central idea, defined as liberation from samsara through knowledge and self-knowledge (Bilimoria P. , 2007). These Upanishads equated Moksa with the attainment of the Supreme Self and stressed the need for inner purity and wisdom.

### **Philosophical Variations:**

1. **Cārvāka Philosophy:** This materialistic school regards pleasure as the final aim and discards metaphysical accounts. In the view of the Cārvākas, the breaking up of the body is the end of pain, and they do not have faith in Moksa as deliverance from samsara.
2. **Madhyamika and Yogācāra:** Buddhist philosophies like Madhyamika and Yogācāra provide Moksa views that revolve around the annihilation of ignorance and the attainment of the true nature of reality (Menzies, 2007). These schools stress the transience of everything and the necessity of meditation.
3. **Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika:** These schools emphasize logic and epistemology. They consider Moksa to be the end of pain, birth, and illusions by realizing the real nature of the world.
4. **Sāṅkhya and Yoga:** Here, Moksa means the attainment of the distinction of the puruṣa (pure consciousness) from prakṛti (material nature). Freedom consists in the abolition of attachment to the world.



**Figure 2:** Philosophical Variations (Peetush, 2017)

### **Modern Perspectives:**

The idea of Moksa still has a profound impact on contemporary Indian thinking, particularly in philosophical, spiritual, and religious traditions. It remains the highest freedom, the state of ecstasy, and a release from the cycle of samsara. But Moksa can be interpreted in quite diverse ways, ranging from self-realization in Advaita Vedanta to the service-based and devotion-based Moksa in Sikhism and Bhakti traditions (Powell, 2023).

In short, Moksa is the peak of spiritual realization in various Indian philosophies, though differently understood within each tradition, yet universally desired as liberation from

worldly life's entanglements. It is both a personal and universal aspiration, to be attained through knowledge, devotion, righteous living, and spiritual practice.

#### **4. MOKSA IN ORTHODOX AND HETERODOX SCHOOLS OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY:**

The notion of Moksa or emancipation occupies a primary position in Orthodox as well as Heterodox schools of Indian philosophy. Each school, though, views Moksa in a distinct way, in light of its metaphysical, epistemological, and moral orientation (Goott, 2023). The following is an investigation of the manner in which Moksa is viewed within the two general groups of Indian philosophy:

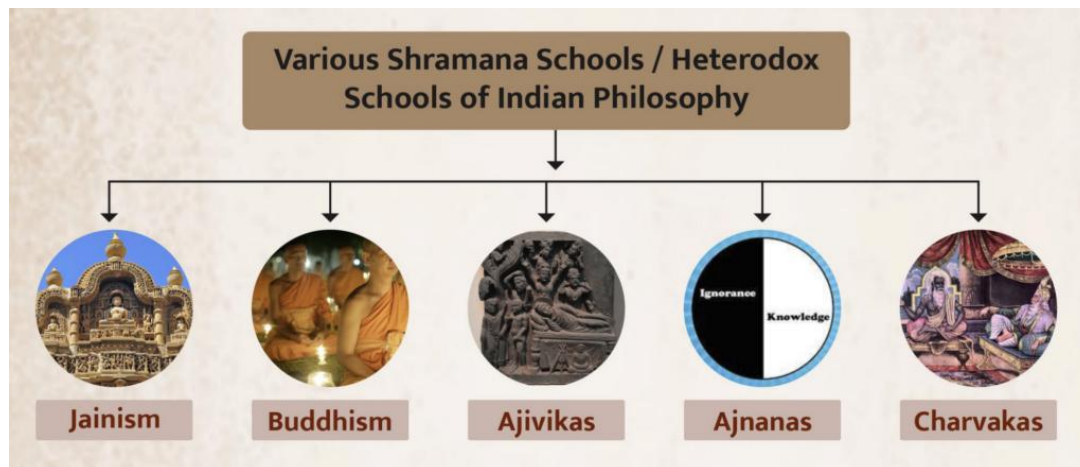
##### **4.1. Moksa in Orthodox Schools of Indian Philosophy:**

In the Orthodox schools (Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, Vedanta), Moksa is realized as the emancipation of the self from the cycle of birth and death through knowledge, self-realization, and righteous practices.

- **Nyaya and Vaisheshika:** These systems emphasize the attainment of proper knowledge to destroy ignorance, which is regarded as the source of bondage and suffering. Moksa is attained through the eradication of ignorance and awareness of the world and self's reality.
- **Samkhya and Yoga:** They both suggest a dualistic philosophy, wherein Moksa is the attainment of the difference between the imperishable and immutable soul (Purusha) and the material world (Prakriti). Moksa is reached when one's soul is freed from material nature and misery.
- **Mimamsa:** This school believes in the observance of ritual actions and righteous behavior to cleanse the soul and achieve Moksa. According to it, Moksa is achieved through the execution of Vedic rituals, which cleanse the mind and result in emancipation.
- **Vedanta:** Especially Advaita Vedanta, Moksa is an awareness of oneness of individual soul (Atman) with the absolute reality (Brahman). Through self-consciousness, self-awareness and an understanding of a lack of disconnection from the absolute one comes to experience freedom.

##### **4.2. Moksa in Heterodox Schools of Indian Philosophy:**

The Heterodox schools, comprising Buddhism, Jainism, Cārvāka, Ajivikas, and Ajnanas, provide different understanding of Moksa (liberation). They differ greatly from the Orthodox schools of Hindu thought and provide dissimilar perspectives to the idea of liberation.



**Figure 3:** Heterodox Schools of Indian Philosophy (Sandilya, 2014)

### 1. Buddhism:

In Buddhism, Nirvāṇa is the same as Moksha, which means liberation from suffering. Accomplishing this requires letting go of attachment, desire, and ignorance. According to Buddhist thought, ignorance and wants are the root of all evil and suffering. To attain this freedom, one must follow the Eightfold Path, which consists of correct perception, thought, speech, behavior, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. The term nirvāṇa is used to describe the cessation of all desires and pain, which in turn leads to enlightenment and freedom from the vicious cycle of samsara, which includes birth, death, and rebirth.

### 2. Jainism:

In Jainism, Moksha is the liberation of the soul from the cycle of reincarnation and birth that is attained by purifying one's karma. The three pillars of Jain philosophy are ahimsa (nonviolence), aparigraha (non-possessiveness), and anekantavada (non-absolutism). By adhering to rigorous ethical behavior such as asceticism, meditation, and right conduct, a practitioner can cleanse their soul, resulting in a position of infinite knowledge, bliss, and freedom. In Jain philosophy, Moksha is a condition in which the soul is not controlled by karma and is free from the cycle of samsara (Hurdoyal-Chekhori, 2021).

### 3. Cārvāka (Materialism):

The Cārvāka School, a materialistic and atheistic school of thought, eliminates the concept of Moksha altogether. It does not believe in the existence of an eternal soul or the afterlife. For the Cārvāka school, freedom is merely the end of life itself. The school believes that the end of life is the end of pain, and this end is the ultimate state of tranquility. According to this perception, Moksha is not a liberation beyond the cosmos but simply the inevitable terminus of an individual's life, freed from all metaphysical or religious connotations.

### 4. Ajivikas:

The Ajivika School established by Makkhali Gosala has a deterministic concept of liberation. The Ajivikas held that all things in the universe, including human actions, are controlled by Niyati (predestination or cosmic fate) (Bhuyan, 2022). Their ultimate state of liberation,

according to their view, is not attainable through human action or ethical endeavor but through the recognition that all things, including birth, existence, and death, are predetermined. They believed that Moksa happens when one's cycle of karma automatically ceases as a result of the inevitable cosmic law, and the soul is freed from the cycle of rebirth without requiring any moral practice or spiritual effort.

## **5. Ajnanas:**

The Ajnana School alternatively connected with Ajñāna (ignorance) or Brahmanic nihilism is nihilistic in its understanding of liberation. It is an idea that teaches that Moksa or freedom is not a good state of being but rather the negation of all distinction and perception. According to the Ajnanas, freedom is the total destruction of the self and all personal identity (Ferrante, 2014). Moksa, in this perspective, is not a realization or attainment but a condition where all knowledge, distinction, and individual experience are at an end, resulting in utter non-existence or "nothingness."

## **5. CONCLUSION:**

The philosophy of Moksa, as investigated through different orthodox and heterodox Indian schools of thought, is a complex concept of liberation. The research reveals how different schools of philosophy, such as Vedanta, Buddhism, Jainism, and others, provide distinct avenues to Moksa, based on self-realization, virtuous living, and the elimination of suffering. Although the methods are different, there runs through them a unifying thread in the focus on inner change and spiritual liberation. This comparison brings out the rich diversity of Indian thought as well as highlighting the universal search for freedom from the bondage of birth and death. Through ethical discipline, meditation, and profound insight into the self, Moksa continues to be a perennial and universal topic in the philosophy of India.

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