

Introduction:
Living Liberation in Hindu Thought

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Questions concerning the attainment of human perfection, or liberation, have animated religious thinkers across many cultures, past and present. All religious traditions address the urge to realize one's true nature, to gain identity or communion with the highest reality, and simultaneously to end finitude and become free from sin and evil, ignorance and desire. Hindu thinkers have made significant contributions to this conversation.

In the Hindu tradition,¹ liberation (*mokṣa*, *mukti*) from the cycle of suffering and rebirth (*saṃsāra*) is the supreme goal of human existence, and much has been written about the path to and nature of release. A question that regularly arises in this context is whether liberation is possible while living—that is, embodied. Unlike religious thinkers in many other cultures, who generally focus on salvation after death, Hindu authors and schools of thought frequently claim that embodied liberation, often called *jīvanmukti*, is possible, though there is no consensus about exactly what one is liberated from or to. Other thinkers hold that one is inevitably still bound while embodied, and that no ultimate state is achievable while living. In addition to disputes about the possibility of embodied liberation, there are differing views on the types, degrees, or stages of liberation, some attainable in the body and some not.

Despite the range and vigor of these disputes, no existing book approaches recording the full variety of questions asked, much less the myriad answers given, about the nature of living liberation in Hindu thought. Individual authors such as A. G. Krishna Warriar,² A. K. Lad,³ L. K. L.

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Srivastava,⁴ and Chacko Valiaveetil⁵ have produced studies describing the views of several Hindu schools on living liberation. However, no one to date has published a collection like this one, in which each chapter is authored by a scholar specializing in the thinker, philosophical school, or texts the chapter addresses.

Let us further clarify what this book does and does not cover: the essays collected here look at living liberation according to major thinkers living during the era of classical Indian civilization or texts written during that period. Each chapter, based on close readings of selected texts, will show how one or more specific schools or thinkers define liberation and, where applicable, characterize one liberated while living. In addition, each of the authors shows how one teaching on *jīvanmukti* is distinguished from the views of other schools or thinkers, and what problems appear (and possibly remain unresolved) within that teaching. The editors have striven to ensure that each chapter is both philosophically accurate, as well as accessible to those who are not familiar with the broad sweep of Hindu thought.

While the chapters include some literary, historical, and exegetical analysis, they focus on philosophical and/or theological issues. Such issues reflect our focus on classical texts and the schools or traditions that follow them, rather than on popular images of living liberation. However, it is certainly the case (as some of our chapters suggest) that the *jīvanmukti* ideal has had broad appeal beyond Sanskrit texts or formal philosophical schools. One might well expect this when the option to gain release in this very body, not only after the cessation of life, is claimed to be possible. The plausibility of living liberation to many Hindus can be seen in the long tradition of sages, saints, and *siddhas* worshipped throughout the subcontinent, from ancient times to the present. These figures and their followers deserve study, but would require methods and expertises beyond the scope of this book.

Readers will also note that we have not included modern Indian interpretations of living liberation in this volume. Indian thinkers from the era of British influence have been affected by a wide diversity of new ideas, often quite foreign to classical Indian thought. To do justice to the views of *jīvanmukti* seen in the writings of figures like Swami Vivekananda, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Sri Aurobindo, or Ramana Maharshi would and should demand a separate volume.⁶

Our focus on classical Hindu thought allows us to begin with certain shared assumptions. All thinkers discussed here accept the pervasiveness of suffering and ignorance experienced by embodied beings within the cycle of birth and death (*samsāra*). All thinkers agree that embodied beings possess some form of self or soul apart from the body and mind. Finally,

all accept that life's goal is to end desire-filled action (*karma*) that leads to bondage and rebirth. This is accomplished through liberating insight into the true Self and/or devotion to a personal Lord. Despite these commonalities, one finds no consensus in Hindu thought about the nature of either living or final liberation. Given the enormous variety of religious and philosophical traditions which make up "Hinduism," this diversity is hardly surprising. The following chapters reveal final liberation conceived in various ways: as the cessation of ignorance about the non-dual nature of Self (*ātman*) and ultimate reality (Brahman) which brings serenity and bliss; as release from suffering brought on by compulsive mental activity into perfect solitude (*kaivalya*); or as a soul's joyous communion with a personal loving Lord. These conceptions will shape the respective school's visions of living liberation.

While the diversity of traditions considered by our contributors militates against any uniform treatment of living liberation, the reader will notice certain questions and problems arise repeatedly in these chapters. While these questions are not exhaustive, they certainly indicate the range of issues which relate to living liberation. Some frequently addressed groups of questions include:

- What is the relation of liberation to embodiment? Does embodiment inevitably mean suffering and ignorance of nonduality or separation from God? Is living liberation even possible, and if so, is it truly equal to bodiless liberation?
- How do forms of bondage such as *karma* (or, in Śaivism, the *malas*) limit or prevent liberation? What kind of *karma* is removed, when, and by what, on the path to liberation?

How are *karma* and ignorance related? Does one cause the other? Is liberation prompted by knowledge alone, or is something more needed? Does any remnant of ignorance remain for an embodied being after liberation has been won? How does this remnant limit this being?

- How does one overcome the obstacles to liberation? By knowledge, devotion, yogic practice, renunciation, and/or performing Vedic ritual duties? Is one of these key? Do they work together?

Of what or whom must one gain knowledge? Is devotion to a form of God necessary or helpful, and if so, which one? How is this devotion expressed? How does the Lord respond? What relationship does the Lord have with those who have won liberation, both before and after death?

How are processes of purification and Yogic enstasis (*sa-*

mādhi) related to liberation? Does Yogic practice merely open the way to and/or safeguard liberation, or does Yogic realization bring liberation itself? Can one “backslide”?

- If one can be liberated while living, how does such a person act in the world? Do one’s actions change after obtaining the highest embodied state? How and by whom is liberation recognizable? If renunciation is required, what is renounced? Must the living liberated being conform to *dharmic* norms?

Chapter Summaries

The essays fall loosely into three groups. The first three chapters consider the idea of *jīvanmukti* according to key thinkers of three different schools of Vedānta: Śaṅkara’s Advaita, Rāmānuja’s Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Madhva’s Dvaita. Next are three chapters on texts that focus on yogic disciplines and renunciation in living liberation; they examine ideas of liberation while embodied in the classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga schools, the “Yogic Advaita” of Vidyāraṇya’s *Jīvanmuktiviveka*, and the perfect renunciation (and devotion) of the epic and Purāṇic figure Śuka. Finally we look at two very different models of living liberation in Śaivism: those of the tantric Kāśmīrī Śaivism of Abhinavagupta and of the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta of Meykaṅṭār and his followers. The conclusion identifies and explores common themes and crucial disputed points within and among the various teachings on living liberation.

In our first chapter, Lance Nelson surveys the development of the *jīvanmukti* doctrine according to the Advaita (non-dual) Vedānta tradition of Śaṅkara (fl CE 700). Nelson shows that while Advaitins generally hold that living liberation is possible and the highest goal of life, they find that justifying this idea within Advaitin metaphysics is problematic. The central problem is this: if the body (and mind) are bound by *karma*, and thus are part of ignorance, and ignorance completely ceases with liberating knowledge, how can one be embodied (ignorant) *and* liberated? Nelson looks at texts from the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*, as well as Śaṅkara’s commentaries. For Advaitins, these texts indicate that when one realizes the body is not the Self and then acts with utter detachment, one can be said to be liberated while living. In this view, bodilessness is not a physical condition, but a state of realization.

A few Advaitins find the notion of liberation while living fundamentally flawed, claiming that liberation must entail the end of all *karma* and immediate disembodiment. However, most Advaitins hold that the body

continues after liberation due to the persistence of a special form of *karma*: *prārabdha*, or currently manifesting, *karma*. Like a potter's wheel that continues to spin even after the potter departs, the body remains for a time due to *prārabdha-karma* even after realization. The idea that *prārabdha-karma* must be exhausted before physical disembodiment is the linchpin for later Advaitin philosophical arguments for the possibility of liberation while living. Nelson shows that, from the Upaniṣads to Śāṅkara and later Advaitins, there is much wrestling with, and no unanimity about, the nature and role of *prārabdha-karma*. He points out that, in order to "save" *prārabdha-karma* as the substratum of bodily continuity from powerful critiques that objected to this notion's logical inconsistencies, later Advaitins describe increasingly subtle (or baroque?) manifestations of ignorance, such as a remnant (*leśa*) or impression (*samskāra*) of ignorance that takes form as *prārabdha-karma*. Some claim a *leśa* remains after knowledge, just as a slight trembling continues even after one recognizes that a snake is merely a rope. Others, including Śāṅkara, suggest (though often only in passing) that full liberating insight may be present only when one is in meditative ecstasy (*samādhi*). Thus, Nelson makes clear that Advaitins never settle on a definitive, unproblematic position about how living (embodied) liberation is possible.

In a final section, Nelson also takes an interesting and original look at how Advaitins might use Īśvara, the Lord, as a model for understanding the *jīvanmukta*. While doing this, he illustrates the Advaitins' ambivalence in endorsing the notion that liberation is complete while one is still embodied, since they say that participation in empirical existence, even by the Lord, is inevitably limited. According to Nelson, the problem of achieving liberating knowledge while acting in mundane existence is resolved by seeing Īśvara, who is active yet (almost) free from ignorance, as exemplar for the living liberated being. One example is Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Still, both Īśvara and the *jīvanmukta*, Nelson points out, are limited, and even constituted, by ignorance and its adjuncts conditioned by *karma*. Perhaps, he suggests, we might look at Īśvara as "a kind of eternal *jīvanmukta* of cosmic dimensions. Is the Lord not, like the *jīvanmukta*, liberated but somehow not yet fully liberated?" As this question implies, the Advaitin ideal is ultimately not *jīvanmukti* but bodiless *kaivalya* (absolute isolation) beyond the false "magic show" of empirical existence.

Kim Skoog offers the first of two essays on theistic Vedāntins who reject Advaitin *jīvanmukti* and the non-dualist perspective in general, and instead insist that Brahman is ultimately a personal Lord, Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. Using formal philosophical analysis, Skoog critically analyzes how the eleventh-century Viśiṣṭādvaitin, Rāmānuja, in his commentary on the *Brahma*

Sūtra 1.1.4, attempts to refute Śaṅkara's claims about the nature of liberation, particularly that liberation is truly possible while living.

According to Skoog, Rāmānuja distorts Śaṅkara's view, finding him a "subjective idealist." If, as Rāmānuja claims, Śaṅkara argues that the world (including the body) is an illusion, then it would follow that realization of the world's illusoriness should cause the cessation of all appearance (including the body). One could not, therefore, be both realized and embodied. However, Skoog points out that Śaṅkara is actually a "qualified realist"; that is, he does not simply say "the world is unreal," but asserts the world has provisional reality, though its existence is inexplicable (*anirvacanīya*). Thus, Skoog argues, Rāmānuja's critique fails.

Skoog goes on to explain that Rāmānuja holds that the empirical world and individual self are real and different from the Lord, and that the limited, *samsāra*-bound self acts and inevitably suffers while embodied. Thus, true liberation necessarily means the cessation of embodiment. In Rāmānuja's view, one must perform ritual and devotional acts to remove bondage and gain the grace of the Lord, which then frees the soul. The liberated soul then reaches the highest end, communion with the Lord in his heavenly abode, but only after death. Advaitins reject all the above, and, as Skoog points out, argue only that the cessation of *awareness* of embodiment *as real* is necessary for liberation. For Śaṅkara, the self is a pure, immutable witness (*sākṣin*) that is never really bound and not part of the world. Thus, while purifying action might be a useful preliminary, no finite activity can ultimately free the unlimited Self: only knowing Brahman liberates, and this happens while embodied.

Daniel Sheridan's essay shows that while Madhva, the thirteenth-century dualist Vedāntin and anti-Advaitin polemicist, also rejected the Advaitin concept of *jīvanmukti*, he did accept the possibility of "direct and immediate knowledge of God" or *aparokṣa-jñāna* while living. Sheridan claims that embodied existence after Dvaitin *aparokṣa-jñāna* is substantively different but functionally similar to Advaitin *jīvanmukti*. For Madhva, liberation is the personal, eternal, and blissful enjoyment (*bhoga*) of Lord Viṣṇu, not knowing the non-dual Brahman of Advaita. Madhva, like Rāmānuja, also contends that liberation from *samsāra* must occur after death, though enjoyment of God can begin, even if not fully manifesting, while living.

Sheridan shows that for Madhva the means (*sādhana*) to attain liberating knowledge of God include the Advaitin components of renunciation (*vairāgya*), textual study (*śravaṇa*), reflection (*manana*) and meditation (*dhyāna* or *nididhyāsana*). However, Madhva adds the crucial element of devotion (*bhakti*) absent in Advaita. All knowledge (*jñāna*), he claims, is

really part of *bhakti*, for the highest knowledge dispels the ignorance of the self's independence and fosters love of and devotion to Viṣṇu. Sheridan makes clear that Madhva adamantly holds, contra Advaita, that everything, including ignorance, is derived from and dependent (*paratantra*) on the self-existent (*svatantra*) personal God/Brahman. We are bound by the ignorance that blocks knowing our dependence on God, and one of the most pernicious kinds of ignorance is the Advaitin notion of non-dualism of self and ultimate reality. Why the Lord creates ignorance is a mystery (but no more mysterious than how ignorance and knowledge can coexist—via *prārabdha-karma*—in Advaita). Yet, like Advaita, Madhva holds that one can have the highest knowledge—here *aparokṣa-jñāna*—while living and still remain embodied for a time due to *prārabdha-karma*. We therefore see Sheridan's point about the functional equivalence of *aparokṣa-jñāna* and *jīvanmukti*, an equivalence eventually made explicit by Vyāsātīrtha, Madhva's 16th century commentator.

In our next section, we examine living liberation in texts emphasizing renunciation and yogic practice, sometimes in addition to or as opposed to a supreme knowledge. Christopher Chapple focuses on conceptions of living liberation in the classical texts of Sāṃkhya and Patañjali's Yoga (though one finds relatively little abstract theorizing about the liberated state in either school). While Sāṃkhya and Yoga share the same basic metaphysics, their techniques to gain liberation are quite different. Chapple shows that Sāṃkhya's emphasis is "on the cultivation of knowledge and non-attachment for liberation," while Yoga stresses "several practices designed to reverse the influence of afflicted tendencies [*saṃskāra*], replacing them with purified modes of behavior."

According to Chapple, the *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* describe living liberation as utter detachment and freedom from compulsive thought and action while still embodied. When one realizes "I am not," one ceases to act, withdraws from *prakṛti*, the realm of manifestation, while the *puruṣa* or detached witness attains perfect solitude (*kaivalya*). Although past impressions (*saṃskāra*, *vāsanā*) creating the notion of an "I" force one to remain alive for a time, no attachment remains.

Chapple continues that Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* emphasizes techniques for liberation that bring about the cessation of all afflicted action (*kleśa-karma*) through extensive meditation, the development of detachment, and rigorous mental purification. This purification process, culminating in meditative ecstasy (*samādhi*), minimizes attachments to the world and ego by "subtilization" (*pratiprasava*), the most familiar version of which is the eight-limbed yogic path. Copyrighted material for living liberation appears here, yet one sees that despite the Yogin's process of purification that "burns"

all impressions, some “sterile” impressions still remain, thus allowing for liberation while embodied. According to Vyāsa, the process of eradicating afflicted action continues until the moment of death. Chapple (like Nelson with the Advaitin *jīvanmukta*) finds the liberated being in Yoga to be like Īśvara, free from afflicted action. In fact, Chapple shows that later Sāṃkhya and Yoga writers are increasingly influenced by Advaitin thought, even incorporating the term “*jīvanmukti*.” This might be called “returning the favor,” for Śaṅkara and the Advaitin tradition have made ample use of the potter’s wheel analogy found in *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* 67–8.

Chapple closes by arguing that Yoga’s emphasis on purification could have been influenced by the Jaina model of liberation through a progression of purificatory stages called “*guṇasthānas*.” Sāṃkhya and Yoga, he suggests, might be read as sequential *sādhanas*: first, Sāṃkhya leads the individual to a state of discerning knowledge equivalent to the right insight (*samyag-darśana*) of Jainism’s fourth *guṇasthāna*. Yoga then takes the individual through an elaborate course of meditative discipline to actual living liberation, equivalent to the Jaina thirteenth or *sayoga-kevalin-guṇasthāna*, when the liberated being remains due to a little leftover *karma* governing bare bodily existence.

Like the *Yoga Sūtra*, Vidyāraṇya’s *Jīvanmuktiviveka*, a syncretic fourteenth-century Advaita text, also holds that yogic discipline is not only an essential part of the path to liberating knowledge, but a practice that must be continued thereafter to eradicate any residual karmic impressions. In his essay on the *Jīvanmuktiviveka*, Andrew Fort writes that Vidyāraṇya, unlike Śaṅkara, “claims that Yoga and ascetic renunciation (*saṃnyāsa*) together both lead to and express the liberating knowledge (*jñāna, vidyā*) of Brahman.” While Vidyāraṇya is Advaitin in holding that knowledge of non-duality is the fundamental cause of liberation while living and that *yoga* alone is insufficient for liberation, his emphasis on the necessity of yogic practice both to gain release by Brahman-knowledge and to safeguard this knowledge by removing leftover *karma* is quite un-Advaitin. He also differs from Śaṅkara in arguing that repeated yogic practice can even overcome the necessity of experiencing *prārabdha-karma*. Thus, Fort argues that Vidyāraṇya’s thought diverges from Śaṅkara’s “mainstream” Advaita toward a “Yogic Advaita,” greatly influenced by Patañjali’s Yoga, the *Laghu Yogavāsīṣṭha*, and the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

Fort claims that “Yogic Advaita” is also apparent in Vidyāraṇya’s closely connecting renunciation (*saṃnyāsa*) and *jīvanmukti*. Vidyāraṇya holds that renunciation (including non-attachment and isolation), like yogic practice, both leads to and follows knowledge. The supreme renunciate, called both *jīvanmukta* and *paramahansa yogin*, is described as both

a knower of Brahman and a master of yoga. And since the highest knowledge is ultimately greater than yogic *samādhi*, so the knower passes beyond practicing conventional *samnyāsa*, for mental detachment through knowing the Self is more basic to liberation than performing duties or bodily renunciation (although a liberated being doesn't actually violate the norms of *dharma*).

Finally, Fort points out that Vidyāraṇya seems to concur with many mainstream Advaitins that, while liberation is certainly possible in life, embodied liberation is not quite equal to liberation without a body (*vi-dehamukti*). Fort goes on to show, however, that Vidyāraṇya puts a new twist on this issue by arguing that one can have bodiless liberation *while embodied*, if bodiless liberation is considered freedom from future, not present, embodiment.

Issues of renunciation and conformity to *dharma* are also central to C. Mackenzie Brown's essay. Both Fort's and Brown's chapters further reveal that discussion of *jīvanmukti* is not limited to systematic philosophical thinkers; living liberation is considered in popular and enormously influential Hindu literature such as the epics and Purāṇas. Brown raises the important question of how one can recognize a *jīvanmukta* as he considers the figure of Śuka in the *Mahābhārata*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and the *Devī-Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. In all, Śuka is considered a perfected being and an ideal renunciate, but the forms of perfection and renunciation vary with each text, particularly concerning the issue of whether householding allows for renunciation and if it is compatible with living liberation.

In the *Mahābhārata*, the wise king Janaka teaches Śuka that liberated existence is marked by utter indifference that is unmoved by temptation. Learning that he need not be a householder, but must simply realize the Self of all, Śuka does so and becomes liberated. And although he does not seem to recognize his own liberation clearly, the text indicates Śuka's perfected non-attachment to be so great that even modest maidens unself-consciously bathe nude in his presence (implicitly recognizing his status by ignoring him). On the other hand, in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* Śuka becomes what Brown calls an "enlightened idiot of dazzle and dirt." Śuka is here a truly radical renunciate whose worldly attachments have been burned out by his devotion to Kṛṣṇa, and who is thus wary of householding and the entire *varṇāśrama-dharma*. Due to his extreme detachment and his cognizance of the divine in all, feces and gold are alike to him. In this text, Śuka's wisdom and beauty are hidden in imbecility, bodily neglect, and grime. While certainly noticed, Śuka is recognized as liberated only by those so detached and pure as to be beyond opposites like purity and pollution.

Finally, Brown describes Śuka in the Śākta-influenced *Devī-Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. In this text, Śuka learns that householding and perfect renunciation are compatible. As in the *Mahābhārata*, Śuka is taught by Janaka (who is interestingly, as Brown points out, of “Videha” or “the bodiless”), a liberated householder who even teaches renunciates. Janaka instructs Śuka to go through the discipline provided by the life-stages (*āśrama*) and to follow the rules of *dharma* to aid the world’s welfare. Janaka claims that inner indifference is true renunciation; while Śuka is attached to being non-attached, Janaka, a king, is free from all attachment even while ruling. Unlike the *Bhāgavata*’s Śuka, who wanders naked, Śuka in the *Devī-Bhāgavata* returns home and becomes a householder-renunciate (“married, with children”). In this text, the liberated Śuka is hard to recognize precisely because he is so ordinary. Brown points out that while both texts teach the importance of intense, loving devotion to God, the form of love is different: in the *Bhāgavata*, norm-breaking passionate love is primary; in the *Devī-Bhāgavata*, society-supporting mother love is most fundamental. Still, as Brown concludes, in neither case is Śuka’s living liberation easy to recognize.

The essays by Paul Muller-Ortega and Chacko Valiaveetil, dealing respectively with the Kāśmīrī Śaivism of the influential thinker Abhinavagupta and the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta of Meykaṅṭār and his followers, offer two very different models of living liberation in Śaiva thought. While sharing many concepts and terminology when describing the world, the soul, its bondage, and the path to liberation, their ontologies are as far apart as their geographical locations: Kāśmīrī non-dualism might well be considered more radical than that of Advaita, while the southern school’s dependent pluralism is reminiscent of Madhva’s Dvaita Vedānta.

Muller-Ortega considers *jīvanmukti* according to the Kāśmīrī Śaiva or Trika-Kaula branch of Hindu Tantra. He begins by discussing the problem of defining Kāśmīrī Śaivism, a term that has had various meanings. The tantric Śaivas of Abhinavagupta’s lineage (which Muller-Ortega deals with here) hold one can gain liberation even while embodied if granted a sufficient “descent of energy” (*śaktipāta*). According to Muller-Ortega, Abhinavagupta (eleventh century) emphasizes the importance of one’s identity with Śiva by means of direct and conscious yogic realization (“entering the domain of the Heart”), rather than by mere intellectual comprehension. In the *Parātrimśikā-vivaraṇa*, Abhinava holds that “the *jīvanmukta* becomes co-equal with Śiva as the possessor and wielder of the cosmic powers” called *śaktis*, and obtains “unitive perception of the omnipresence of Śiva.” The tantric *jīvanmukta*, when liberation is accomplished (*siddha*), thus passes beyond the *varṇāśrama-dharma*, renunciation, and all

polarities. He becomes free like Śiva, and may perform transgressive rituals which demonstrate transcendence of *dharma* and brahminical purity.

Muller-Ortega shows that the Kāśmīri Śaivas claim that both bondage and the path to liberation derive from Śiva. Śiva freely wills His self-concealment and limitation, and also wills liberation through *śaktipāta*. Śiva “constructs a zone of contraction of limitation, through which he then forces himself to traverse, and the result is the finite, transmigrating self.” As with the Śaiva Siddhāntins, the “contractive zone” is constituted by impurities (*malas*), and from this impure, limited condition one ascends back to identity with Śiva through thirty-six *tattvas* (adapted from Sāṃkhya and seven states called *pramāṭrs* or “experiencers.” In the highest state, when one realizes “I am Śiva,” all ‘objectivity’ is assimilated into blissful, unified consciousness, which is Śiva, and one is liberated while living.

Chacko Valiaveetil describes *jīvanmukti* in Śaiva Siddhānta, focusing on Meykaṅṭār’s *Śivajñāna Bodham* (thirteenth century) and its commentators. Valiaveetil explains that the saints of this school wrote hymns praising “the gracious Lord who saved them from the fetters of *samsāra* and calling on men to take refuge under his Sacred Feet.” Śaiva Siddhāntins claim that neither Śaṅkara’s Advaitin *jñāna* nor ritual action can, by itself, bring release; only selfless *bhakti* allows humans to obtain the liberating grace of the Lord. According to its adherents, Śaiva Siddhānta is “the true Advaita which upholds the absolute supremacy of God and at the same time unhesitatingly accepts the reality of the world and souls.” The path to liberation is dominated by the progressive surrender of the self to the love and grace of the Lord. *Jīvanmukti* is both realization while living of union with the Lord and the simultaneous freeing from bonds or *malas* that impede, and can cause relapse from, liberation. The *mala*-circumscribed love of self is gradually replaced by loving (comm)union: “the soul becomes one with the Lord without losing its individuality, so that they are neither one nor two.” Valiaveetil adds that Siddhāntins must safeguard this liberated state by repeated meditation on and worship of the Lord (as Vidyāraṇya holds one must safeguard *mukti* by yogic practice).

Valiaveetil also addresses aspects of the “*karma* problem” discussed in other chapters, including the question of why a liberated being still has *karma* and remains in a body always prone to suffering. Part of the answer lies in the Siddhāntin view that embodied liberation exists to provide the opportunity to experience communion with Śiva in this very world and then to express the Lord’s love and grace to others. In addition, and again like Vidyāraṇya, the liberated being transcends conventional morality, here due to his utter detachment and single-minded devotion to Śiva. However,

this being still sets an example for others and protects himself from relapse by associating with other Śaiva *bhaktas*, using sacred emblems (ashes, beads, and so forth), and worshipping temple images.

Patricia Mumme's concluding essay seeks to identify common ground, recurring themes, and fundamental tensions among the views of *jīvanmukti* presented in the earlier chapters. She identifies three general positions on *jīvanmukti* in the various schools and authors represented here: strong, which includes those who clearly define living liberation as a discrete state; medium, which describes those who accept the concept, but without defining it so clearly or discretely; and weak, which includes those who reject the notion of full liberation while living. According to this model, Advaita and Sāṃkhya positions are strong, Madhva's and Rāmānuja's positions are weak, and the remaining authors or schools hold views in the medium range. Mumme explores whether and to what extent the strength of a school's position on living liberation correlates with its stance on some related doctrinal issues: its overall metaphysics, its doctrine of God or Īśvara, and its claims about the kinds of *karma* and conscious experience characterizing the individual in the highest attainable living state.

She also considers the need many schools felt to assert the existence of liberated teachers, and the varying claims thinkers made about the behavior of *jīvanmuktas*, including their degree of conformity to dharmic norms. Mumme suggests that the preponderance of Vaiṣṇava schools in the weak position can be explained by noting that, unlike other schools discussed here, they do not need to validate the authority of their founding teachers and *gurus* by calling them *jīvanmuktas*. In the Vaiṣṇava tradition, teachers and *gurus* are usually seen as descents (*avatāra*) of either Viṣṇu or his associates. She concludes with some suggestions for future research, such as investigating living liberation in Buddhism and in neo-Vedānta.

Notes

1. Defining "Hinduism" is, of course, a controversial and unresolved issue and one that is not central to our book. For our purposes, "Hindu" authors and schools of thought refer to those who take the Veda and *Itihāsa-purāṇa* as authoritative, and/or worship some form of Viṣṇu or Śīva. We add the latter phrase because much of devotional (particularly Śaiva) Hinduism is Vedic in only the most tangential sense.

2. *The Concept of Mukti in Advaita Vedānta* (Madras: Univ. of Madras, 1961). Krishna Warriar describes various Indian conceptions of liberation on the way to positing the superiority of the Advaita Vedāntin view.

3. *A Comparative Study of the Concept of Liberation in Indian Philosophy* (Burhanpur: Gindharlal Keshavdas, 1967). Lad's writing is heavily influenced by Western philosophical concepts, and he gives a neo-Vedāntin reading of liberation in Indian thought.

4. *Advaitic Concept of Jīvanmukti* (Delhi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1990). Srivastava's book, also largely neo-Vedāntin, gives a cursory examination of non-Advaitin views of living liberation.

5. *Liberated Life* (Madurai: Dialogue Series, 1980). Valiaveetil (a contributor here) has also looked at living liberation according to a variety of schools, focusing ultimately on Śaiva Siddhānta.

6. Some of these modern Indian thinkers have argued that the Hindu notion that one gains liberation in this very life—as opposed to a salvation only after death—is evidence of the superiority of Hindu religious ideas over those of the West. They say the *jīvanmukti* ideal indicates that Hindu thought offers a highly positive view of the possibilities of human existence, what might be called a truly extraordinary “human potential movement.” I plan to document some of these ideas in future publications.