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, liberation (mokṣa, mukti) from the cycle of suffering and rebirth (samsāra) 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 Warrier, A. K. Lad, L. K. L.
Srivastava, and Chacko Valiaveetil 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 jivanmukti 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 jivanmukti 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 jivanmukti seen in the writings of figures like Swami Vivekananda, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Sri Aurobindo, or Ramana Maharshi would and should demand a separate volume.

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 further 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-
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 be conform to dharmic norms?

Chapter Summaries

The essays fall loosely into three groups. The first three chapters consider the idea of jivanmukti 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 Śaṅkhya and Yoga schools, the “Yogic Advaita” of Vidyāranya’s Jīvanmukti Viveka, and the perfect renunciation (and devotion) of the epic and Purānic figure Śuka. Finally we look at two very different models of living liberation in Śaivism: those of the tantric Kāśmīri Saivism of Abhinavagupta and of the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta of Meykanṭar 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 jivanmukti 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 Śaṅkara 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 (saṃskāra) 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 Śaṅkara, suggest (though often only in passing) that full liberating insight may be present only when one is in meditative enstasy (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 useĪśvara, 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 seeingĪśvara, who is active yet (almost) free from ignorance, as exemplar for the living liberated being. One example is Krṣna in the Bhagavad Gītā. Still, bothĪśvara 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 atĪśvara 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 jīvanmukta 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 Brahma is ultimately a personal Lord, Viṣṇu-Nārāyana. 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 (anir-vacanīya). 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 (sākṣīn) 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 (śravanā), reflection (manana) and meditation (dhyāna or nīdhdhyāsana). 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 (paratāntra) on the
self-existent (svatantra) personal God/Brahman. We are bound by the igno-
rance 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 Vyāsatirtha,
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 liv-
ing liberation in the classical texts of Sāṁkhya and Patañjali’s Yoga
(though one finds relatively little abstract theorizing about the liberated
state in either school). While Sāṁkhya and Yoga share the same basic
metaphysics, their techniques to gain liberation are quite different. Chapp-
le shows that Sāṁkhya’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 [samskāra], re-
placing them with purified modes of behavior.”

According to Chapple, the Sāṁkhya 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 impres-
sions (samskāra, 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 enstasy (samādhi), minimizes attachments to the world and
ego by “subutilization” (pratiprasava), the most familiar version of which is
the eight-limbed yogic path. No explicit term 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 Sāmkhya and Yoga writers are increasingly influenced by Advaitin thought, even incorporating the term “jīvanmukti.” This might be called “returning the favor,” for Śankara and the Advaitin tradition have made ample use of the potter’s wheel analogy found in Sāmkhya 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 “gunaśthānas.” Sāmkhya and Yoga, he suggests, might be read as sequential sādhanas: first, Sāmkhya leads the individual to a state of discerning knowledge equivalent to the right insight (samyag-darśana) of Jainism’s fourth gunaśthāna. Yoga then takes the individual through an elaborate course of meditative discipline to actual living liberation, equivalent to the Jaina thirteenth or sayoga-kevalin-gunaśthāna, when the liberated being remains due to a little leftover karma governing bare bodily existence.

Like the Yoga Sūtra, Vidyāranya’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 Vidyāranya, unlike Śankara, “claims that Yoga and ascetic renunciation (sāmyāsa) together both lead to and express the liberating knowledge (jñāna, vidyā) of Brahman.” While Vidyāranya 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 Śankara in arguing that repeated yogic practice can even overcome the necessity of experiencing prārabdha-karma. Thus, Fort argues that Vidyāranya’s thought diverges from Śankara’s “mainstream” Advaita toward a “Yogic Advaita,” greatly influenced by Patañjali’s Yoga, the Laghu Yogavāsiṣṭha, and the Bhagavad Gītā.

Fort claims that “Yogic Advaita” is also apparent in Vidyāranya’s closely connecting renunciation (sāmyāsa) and jīvanmukti. Vidyāranya holds that renunciation (including non-attachment and isolation), like yogic practice, both leads to and follows knowledge. The supreme renunciate, called both jīvanmukta and paramahamsa 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 Vidyāranya 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 (videhamukti). Fort goes on to show, however, that Vidyāranya 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 jivamukti 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 jivamukta as he considers the figure of Suka in the Mahābhārata, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, and the Devi-Bhāgavata Purāṇa. In all, Suka 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 Suka 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, Suka does so and becomes liberated. And although he does not seem to recognize his own liberation clearly, the text indicates Suka’s perfected non-attachment to be so great that even modest maidsens unself-consciously bathe nude in his presence (implicitly recognizing his status by ignoring him). On the other hand, in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa Suka becomes what Brown calls an “enlightened idiot of dazzle and dirt.” Suka 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 varnāśrama-dharma. Due to his extreme detachment and his cognizance of the divine in all, feces and gold are alike to him. In this text, Suka’s wisdom and beauty are hidden in imbecility, bodily neglect, and grime. While certainly noticed, Suka 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 Meykaṭṭār 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 consider 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 Parātrimsikā-vivarana, Abhinava holds that “the jīvanmukta becomes co-equal with Śiva as the possessor and wielder of the cosmic powers” called saktis, and obtains “unitive perception of the omnipresence of Śiva.” The tantric jīvanmukta, when liberation is accomplished (siddhā), thus passes beyond the varnāśrama-dharma, renunciation, and all
polarities. He becomes free like Śiva, and may perform transgressive rituals which demonstrate transcendence of dharma and brahminal purity.

Muller-Ortega shows that the Kāśmīrī 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 sāktipāta. 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 Sāṅkhyā and seven states called pramātras 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 jīvamukti in Śaiva Siddhānta, focusing on Meykanṭar’s Śivajñāna Bodham (thirteenth century) and its commentators. Valiaveetil explains that the sants 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 Saṅkara’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. Jīvamukti 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 Vidyāranya 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 Vidyāranya, 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 jivanmukti presented in the earlier chapters. She identifies three general positions on jivanmukti 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 called 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 Śiva. 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 Warrier 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-Vedântin reading of liberation in Indian thought.


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 Siddhânta.

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 *jivanmukti* 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.