

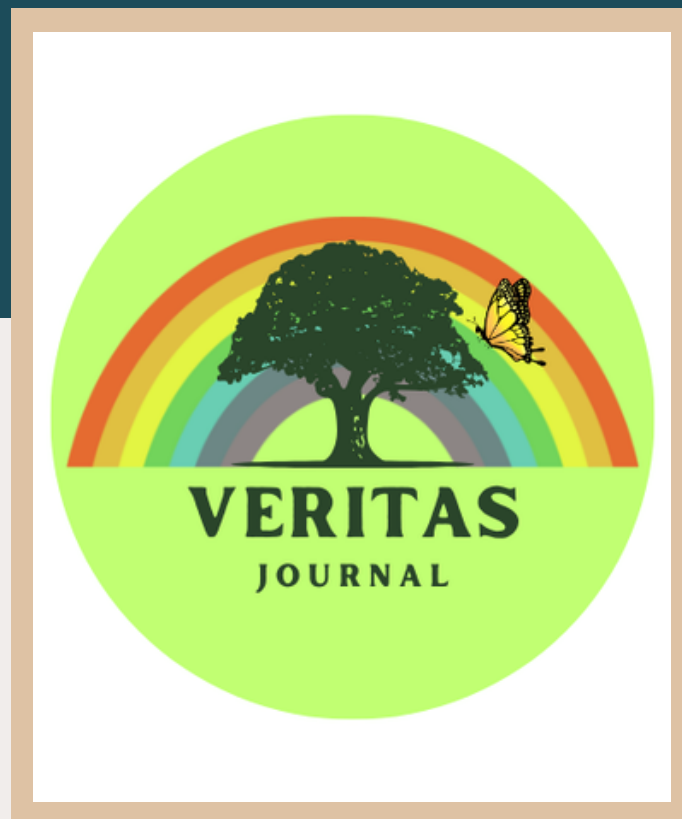
www.myveritasjournal.com

VERITAS:

A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF
SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

ISSN: 3107-748X

Vol. I, Issue 05



September 2026

Editor: Lt. Dr. B. Ajantha Parthasarathi



Two Paths Beyond Suffering: A Comparative Study of Dukkha in Jaina and Buddhist Philosophy

Mihirjauti Talukdar

*Student, Department of philosophy
Cotton University, Guwahati, Assam*

Abstract

The problem of suffering is one of the central concerns of Indian philosophy. Jainism and Buddhism, both developing within the Śramaṇa tradition, pay particular attention to the questions of why people suffer and how they can be freed from suffering. Although both philosophies regard worldly existence as unsatisfactory and emphasize detachment, ethics and liberation, they explain suffering in different ways. Buddhism sees dukkha as one of the basic constituents of existence and associates it mainly with craving, attachment, ignorance and the impermanent nature of existence. Jainism, on the other hand, explains suffering primarily through the concepts of karma, bondage and the interaction between the soul and karmic matter. This paper compares the nature and causes of suffering in Jain and Buddhist philosophy and analyses their different approaches to liberation. Particular attention is paid to dukkha, karma, attachment, the concept of self and liberation. The paper argues that, although both traditions share a practical interest in overcoming suffering, their underlying metaphysical positions are significantly different. Jainism aims at the purification and liberation of an enduring soul, whereas Buddhism aims at liberation from craving and ignorance without accepting permanent self. Their approaches therefore represent two closely related but distinct responses to the universal human experience of suffering.

Keywords

Dukkha, Jainism, Buddhism, Karma, Liberat

Introduction

Suffering is a universal part of human experience. People face pain, loss, ageing, illness, separation, disappointment, and uncertainty throughout life. Philosophers have therefore repeatedly asked whether suffering is simply an unavoidable part of existence or whether there is a way to understand and overcome it. In Indian philosophy, this question receives particular attention in the Jain and Buddhist traditions.

Jainism and Buddhism developed in ancient India within the Śramaṇa movement. Both questioned the sufficiency of ritual practices and placed considerable importance on personal discipline, morality and liberation from saṃsāra. Their common concern with human suffering has sometimes led to emphasizing similarities rather than differences. However, their explanations of suffering are based on different understandings of reality, the self and liberation.

In Buddhism, dukkha is one of the most important philosophical concepts. Although it is often translated as “suffering”, its meaning is wider. It includes physical and psychological suffering, but also the unsatisfactoriness that arises since everything conditioned is subject to change. Even pleasant experiences cannot provide permanent satisfaction because they do not last. Buddha’s teaching therefore

begins with recognizing dukkha and understanding its cause, its cessation and the path leading to its cessation.

Jainism also considers worldly existence as characterized by suffering and bondage, but explains this condition through the interaction between the soul and karma. The jīva is understood as an eternal, conscious reality whose natural qualities become obscured by karmic bondage. Liberation therefore means freeing the soul from accumulated karmas.

The difference between these two approaches becomes apparent in their understanding of the self. Jainism accepts the existence of an enduring soul, whereas Buddhism rejects the idea of a permanent self through the doctrine of anātman. Consequently, even though both traditions seek liberation from suffering and saṃsāra, they understand what is liberated and how liberation occurs differently.

This paper will examine these two approaches comparatively. It does not intend to show that one tradition is superior to the other. It aims at understanding how each tradition develops its own philosophical response to the problem of suffering.

Objectives

The objective of this study is to examine the concept of dukkha in Jain and Buddhist philosophy.

The study also aims to identify the major causes of suffering according to both traditions and to compare their explanations of attachment, karma and worldly existence.

An additional objective is to examine the differences between the Jain concept of jīva and the Buddhist doctrine of anātman in terms of suffering and liberation.

Finally, the study will compare the paths of liberation proposed by Jainism and Buddhism and identify the major similarities and differences between them.

Methodology

This study follows a qualitative and comparative philosophical methodology. It is based mainly on the conceptual and textual study of primary and secondary sources relating to Jain and Buddhist philosophy. Important Buddhist sources such as the Nikāyas and selected Jain works, particularly the Tattvārtha Sūtra, are considered alongside established scholarly works on Indian philosophy.

The study focuses on a few central concepts rather than attempting to cover the entire philosophical systems of Jainism and Buddhism. Dukkha, karma, attachment, self and liberation have been selected because they provide a clear basis for comparison. The approach is interpretive and comparative, attempting to understand each tradition within its own framework.

Discussion

i) Dukkha in Buddhist Philosophy

Dukkha occupies a central position in Buddhist philosophy. Buddha's teaching does not begin simply by stating that life is miserable. It encourages the careful examination of ordinary existence and how human beings relate to it. The First Noble Truth identifies dukkha as a basic feature of conditioned existence. Birth, ageing, illness and death are connected with dukkha. So are separation from what one loves,

association with what one dislikes and the frustration of desires. Buddha also describes the five aggregates subject to clinging as dukkha. The concept therefore has a broader meaning than physical suffering. A person can experience pleasure, success or happiness, yet these experiences will be unstable since they are temporary. When something pleasant changes or disappears, attachment to it can produce disappointment. Thus, the problem is not simply that life contains unpleasant experiences, but our desire to find permanent satisfaction in things that are inherently impermanent. This understanding is closely connected with the Buddhist doctrine of impermanence, or *anicca*. Everything conditioned is subject to arising and passing away. However, human beings often behave as if people, possessions, relationships and experiences can provide lasting security. This discrepancy between reality and what we expect becomes an important source of dukkha. The Buddhist analysis therefore calls us to look beyond individual moments of pain and consider how attachment works in our lives.

ii)The Cause of Dukkha

The Second Noble Truth identifies craving, or *taṇhā*, as the origin of dukkha. Craving can take different forms, including the desire for sensual pleasure, the desire to continue existing and the desire for non-existence. Craving is closely connected with ignorance. Humans fail to see that things are impermanent and conditioned and consequently become attached to them. They want pleasant experiences to remain, unpleasant experiences to disappear and their sense of identity to remain stable. When reality does not conform to these expectations, suffering follows. This point is particularly important to understand the Buddhist doctrine of *anātman*, or non-self. Buddhism does not accept the permanent and unchanging self behind the changing physical and mental processes of human existence. What we call a person is understood through the five aggregates: form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. Clinging to these changing processes as if they were a permanent self contributes to suffering. Therefore, Buddhist liberation requires a transformation in our understanding of ourselves and reality.

iii)Cessation and the Buddhist Path

The Third Noble Truth teaches that dukkha can be ceased. If craving is one of its fundamental causes, then its removal makes liberation possible. This cessation is associated with *nirvāṇa*. The Fourth Noble Truth presents the Noble Eightfold Path as a practical way towards this cessation. The path includes right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. The Buddhist path is therefore not merely theoretical. Understanding suffering is expected to lead to a change in our way of living. Ethical conduct, mental discipline and wisdom work together to weaken attachment and ignorance.

iv)Suffering and Bondage in Jain Philosophy

Jain philosophy approaches suffering from a different metaphysical starting point. At the centre of Jain thought is the concept of *jīva*, or soul. *Jīvas* are eternal and conscious realities. In their pure state, they possess unlimited knowledge, perception, energy and bliss, but these qualities become obscured by karmic bondage. The Jain understanding of suffering is therefore closely connected with *saṃsāra*. As long as the soul remains associated with karma, it continues to pass from one form of worldly existence to another. Birth and death, bodily limitations and various forms of suffering are associated with this condition of bondage. One of the most distinctive features of Jain philosophy is its understanding of

karma. Karma is not just an abstract moral law. Jain thinkers describe it as a subtle material substance that gets attached to the soul. Activities of body, speech and mind, particularly when driven by passions, contribute to karmic influx and bondage. The Jain framework of the seven tattvas provides a useful explanation of this process. Āsrava refers to the influx of karma, whereas bandha refers to karmic bondage. Saṃvara is the stopping of further karmic influx, whereas nirjarā is the shedding of accumulated karma. Mokṣa is the final liberation of the soul. Suffering therefore cannot be separated from the larger problem of karmic bondage and the necessity to overcome it. To overcome suffering, the individual must stop karmic influx and shed accumulated karma.

v) Causes of Bondage in Jainism

Jain ethics places particular emphasis on attachment and aversion. Passions such as anger, pride, deceit and greed strengthen karmic bondage. When individuals act under the influence of these passions, their actions have consequences for the soul. The Jain path therefore requires self-control and ethical discipline. The five major vows are ahiṃsā (non-violence), satya (truthfulness), asteya (non-stealing), brahmacarya (celibacy) and aparigraha (non-possession). These principles are not merely rules for social behaviour. They are an effort to reduce attachment and prevent karmic bondage. The Three Jewels (right faith, right knowledge and right conduct) form an important part of the Jain path. Liberation requires the integration of understanding and conduct. Knowledge alone is not sufficient if it does not transform behaviour. Jainism also has a significant place for austerity and self-discipline. Through disciplined conduct and the reduction of passions, the individual prevents new karma from entering and gradually sheds previously accumulated karma. When karmic bondage is completely removed, the soul reaches mokṣa.

vi) Jain and Buddhist Approaches: Similarities

Despite the differences, Jainism and Buddhism share several important features. Both recognize that ordinary worldly existence cannot provide permanent satisfaction and consider attachment as an important source of bondage. Both emphasize on the need to transform one's relationship with desires and worldly experiences. Both traditions also give ethics a central role in the path towards liberation. Buddhism emphasizes on right action, speech and livelihood, whereas Jainism gives special importance to non-violence, self-restraint and the five vows. Another similarity is their emphasis on personal effort. Liberation is not presented as something that can simply be granted through ritual or external authority. The individual must cultivate discipline, knowledge and ethical awareness. Both traditions also reject excessive dependence on worldly pleasures. Their philosophical teachings encourage detachment and self-control, although they differ considerably in how these practices should be carried out.

vii) Fundamental Differences

The most important difference between Jainism and Buddhism concerns the self. Jainism accepts an enduring jīva, the soul that is the subject of experience, the bearer of karma and the entity that ultimately attains liberation. Buddhism, however, rejects the permanent self and according to the doctrine of anātman, what is regarded as the self is a changing combination of physical and psychological processes. This difference affects their understanding of karma. In Jainism, karma becomes associated with the soul and binds it to saṃsāra. In Buddhism, karma is primarily connected with intentional action and its

consequences. Buddhist karma does not require an eternal soul to maintain causal continuity. Their concepts of liberation consequently differ. Jain mokṣa is the complete freedom of the soul from karmic matter, whereas Buddhist nirvāṇa is associated with the cessation of craving, ignorance and the conditions that sustain suffering and rebirth. Their approaches to asceticism also differ. Jainism gives austerity and rigorous self-discipline a particularly important place in the destruction of karma. Buddhism, through the teaching of the Middle Way, rejects both excessive indulgence and extreme self-mortification. It emphasizes a balanced path involving ethical conduct, meditation and wisdom. These differences show that similar concerns do not necessarily lead to similar philosophical conclusions. Jainism and Buddhism both ask how human beings can escape suffering, but they provide different answers because they start with different understandings of reality and the self.

Findings

The comparative study produces several important findings.

First, both Jainism and Buddhism regard ordinary worldly existence as unsatisfactory and associate it with attachment and continued involvement in saṃsāra.

Second, Buddhism explains dukkha primarily through craving, ignorance, impermanence and dependent origination. Jainism explains suffering through karmic bondage and the relationship between the soul and karmic matter.

Third, both traditions consider ethical discipline essential to liberation. Neither considers philosophical knowledge as a sufficient foundation for action.

Fourth, the doctrine of the self creates the most fundamental difference between them. Jainism accepts the eternal jīva, whereas Buddhism rejects a permanent self through anātman.

Fifth, their different understanding of karma leads to different concepts of liberation. Jain mokṣa involves complete liberation of the soul from karma, whereas Buddhist nirvāṇa involves the cessation of craving and ignorance without affirming an eternal soul.

Finally, the comparison demonstrates that Jain and Buddhist philosophies should not simply be described as philosophies of pessimism. Their analysis of suffering is aimed at liberation. Suffering becomes the starting point for a deeper investigation into human existence and the possibility of freedom.

Conclusion

The concept of dukkha provides a meaningful basis for comparing Jain and Buddhist philosophy because both traditions take suffering seriously as a philosophical and existential problem. They do not just describe suffering as an unavoidable fact of life, but attempt to discover its causes and propose practical ways of overcoming it. Buddhism understands dukkha through the changing and conditioned nature of existence. Craving and ignorance lead humans to cling to impermanent experiences and construct a false sense of permanence. Liberation therefore requires wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline, culminating in the cessation of the causes of suffering. Jainism approaches the same problem through its doctrine of the soul and karma. The jīva is inherently pure but becomes bound by karma through actions and passions. Liberation therefore requires stopping further karmic influx and shedding accumulated

karma through right faith, right knowledge, right conduct, and disciplined living. The most significant difference between the two traditions lies in their understanding of the self. Jainism maintains that an eternal soul is ultimately liberated, whereas Buddhism denies the existence of such a permanent self. Consequently, Jain mokṣa can be understood as the complete purification and liberation of the soul, whereas Buddhist nirvāṇa represents the cessation of the causes that sustain suffering and rebirth. Yet their shared emphasis on detachment, ethical discipline, self-control and liberation shows an important common concern. They call human beings to look beyond immediate desires and examine the deeper causes of dissatisfaction. Their differences, on the other hand, make the comparison philosophically richer, demonstrating that the same human problem can be approached through various understandings of reality.

References

- Bodhi, B. (Trans.). (2000). *The connected discourses of the Buddha: A new translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*. Wisdom Publications.
- Jaini, P. S. (1979). *The Jaina path of purification*. University of California Press.
- Long, J. D. (2009). *Jainism: An introduction*. I. B. Tauris.
- Radhakrishnan, S., & Moore, C. A. (Eds.). (1957). *A source book in Indian philosophy*. Princeton University Press.
- Tatia, N. (Trans.). (1994). *That which is: Tattvārtha Sūtra*. HarperCollins.
- Williams, P. (2000). *Buddhist thought: A complete introduction to the Indian tradition*. Routledge.