

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ĀTMAN ACROSS EASTERN AND WESTERN
DOCTRINES: PHILOSOPHICAL, RELIGIOUS, AYURVEDIC AND
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ABSTRACT

Background: The problem of the self concerns the enduring subject of experience: the principle to which bodily change, cognition, memory, moral responsibility, suffering and the search for liberation are attributed. In Indian traditions this inquiry is articulated through such terms as Ātman, Jīva, Puruṣa, Chetanā and Sākṣī, whereas Western traditions employ soul, mind, self, subject, person and consciousness. The thesis on which this article is based argues that these vocabularies overlap only partially and must be interpreted within their own philosophical settings. **Objective:** To critically synthesize the thesis findings on Ātman across Vedic and Upaniṣadic literature, Indian Darśanas, Western philosophy, religious traditions, Āyurveda and selected interdisciplinary theories of consciousness, while preserving the distinctions among these systems. **Methodology/Textual Analysis:** The study is qualitative, textual, interpretative, analytical and comparative. Classical texts, translations, commentaries, philosophical works, Ayurvedic sources, religious texts and selected writings on consciousness were analyzed thematically. Comparison was organized around self and body, consciousness, permanence and change, moral agency, liberation or salvation, identity, health and the limits of scientific explanation. **Key Findings:** Indian thought does not present a single doctrine of Ātman: Sāṃkhya and Yoga defend witness-consciousness; Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika treat self as substance; Mīmāṃsā emphasizes agency; Vedānta relates Ātman to Brahman; Jainism affirms plural Jīvas; Buddhism rejects a permanent self; and Cārvāka identifies consciousness with embodied material existence. Western thought likewise moves through multiple models, from immortal or embodied soul to thinking substance, memory-based identity, bundle theory, transcendental subject and socially conditioned consciousness. Āyurveda is distinctive in situating Ātman within life and health through the conjunction of body, senses, mind and conscious principle. Scientific theories illuminate embodied mechanisms of consciousness but do not, within the thesis, establish or refute metaphysical Ātman. **Conclusion:** Ātman remains a philosophically productive category when interpreted neither as a measurable physical entity nor as an unquestioned dogma, but as a disciplined concept for examining conscious subjectivity, moral agency, human continuity, liberation and holistic well-being.

KEYWORDS: Ātman; selfhood; consciousness; Indian Darśana; Āyurveda; soul; comparative philosophy.**1. INTRODUCTION**

The question of the self arises from an elementary but persistent feature of human life: bodily states change, thoughts and emotions arise and disappear, memory links different phases of experience imperfectly, and social roles alter, yet the person continues to speak and act

through the first-person standpoint of “I.” The philosophical problem is therefore not simply whether there is a soul in a religious sense, but what, if anything, provides identity, awareness, continuity, agency and responsibility through change. Indian philosophical traditions developed a particularly rich vocabulary

around this question—Ātman, Jīva, Puruṣa, Chetanā, Sākṣī, Manas, Buddhi and Ahaṃkāra—while Western traditions spoke in terms of psyche, soul, mind, self, ego, subject, person and consciousness. These terms cannot be treated as interchangeable translations because each belongs to a distinct conceptual history and answers different questions about existence, knowledge, morality and the purpose of life.^[1,2]

The central claim of the thesis is not that “the East” possesses one doctrine of self or that “the West” possesses another. Indian thought itself contains realism, dualism, non-dualism, pluralism, materialism and a doctrine of no-self. The question of Ātman is affirmed, reformulated, pluralized and rejected within the Indian philosophical field. Similarly, Western thought contains strong spiritual, theological, rationalist, empiricist, idealist, moral, historical and material approaches to the self. A defensible comparison therefore requires attention to intra-traditional diversity before any broader contrast is attempted.^[1,3]

Within Indian thought, however, the problem of selfhood is repeatedly connected with existential and soteriological concerns. Karma raises the question of who acts and who experiences the consequence of action. Rebirth raises the question of continuity. Liberation raises the question of what is bound and what becomes free. Moral discipline asks who is responsible. Meditation asks whether the stream of mental modification is identical with the knower of that stream. Āyurveda adds a further question: if life and health involve body, sense organs, mind and Ātman, can the human being be adequately understood through bodily structure alone? These concerns make the doctrine of self inseparable from suffering, conduct, health, knowledge and the possibility of transformation.^[1,2]

The Vedic and Upaniṣadic materials provide the conceptual background. Early Vedic thought is predominantly poetic, ritual and cosmological; it explores Ṛta, Prāṇa, Puruṣa and Yajña rather than presenting a finished doctrine of Ātman. In the Upaniṣads the direction of inquiry turns increasingly inward. The central question becomes not merely what sustains the cosmos but what is the innermost experiencer behind body, senses, speech and mind. Ātman is progressively distinguished from the changing instruments of experience and, in several decisive passages, related to Brahman, the ultimate reality.^[2,4] This transition from cosmic order and life-force to interior inquiry becomes the foundation on which later Darśanas construct rival theories of consciousness and selfhood.

The Indian Darśanas transform Upaniṣadic intuition into explicit philosophical argument. Sāṃkhya distinguishes Puruṣa from Prakṛti; Yoga combines this distinction with a disciplined method for stilling mental modifications; Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika defend a real self through

epistemological and ontological reasoning; Mīmāṃsā connects selfhood with ritual agency and the continuity of karmic consequences; and Vedānta offers competing accounts of the relation between individual self and Brahman.^[1,3] Heterodox traditions deepen the debate rather than standing outside it. Jainism affirms many conscious Jīvas bound by karma. Buddhism denies an eternal substance-self while retaining continuity, moral causation and liberation. Cārvāka rejects a supersensible self and interprets consciousness as a property of the living body. Indian philosophy is therefore not philosophically significant because it unanimously asserts Ātman, but because it subjects the problem of selfhood to sustained internal controversy.

Western philosophy provides a different but equally substantial history. Greek reflection develops from soul as life-principle toward moral and rational accounts in Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Christian philosophy links soul with creation, inwardness, salvation and immortality. Modern philosophy progressively relocates the debate within mind, certainty, personal identity and subjectivity. Descartes makes the thinking self the point of certainty; Spinoza reconceives mind and body within one substance; Leibniz proposes monadic plurality; Locke relates identity to consciousness and memory; Berkeley privileges spirit; Hume dissolves the substantial self into a bundle of perceptions; Kant distinguishes the transcendental condition of experience from theoretical knowledge of the soul; Hegel historicizes self-consciousness; and Marx situates consciousness within material and social life. This trajectory does not amount to a simple rejection of soul. Rather, the vocabulary and explanatory focus of selfhood are repeatedly reconstructed.

Religious traditions further demonstrate that doctrines of self are rarely purely speculative. Hindu traditions connect Ātman with Brahman, karma and mokṣa; Jainism links Jīva with purification and non-violence; Buddhism links the critique of permanent self with release from attachment; Christianity connects soul with God, sin and salvation; Islam treats rūḥ and naḥs within divine creation, discipline and accountability; and Sikh thought places emphasis on divine light and the overcoming of ego. Despite major doctrinal differences, the self is repeatedly interpreted through conduct and transformation rather than abstract metaphysics alone.

Āyurveda occupies a distinctive place because the thesis is situated within Samhitā studies and because classical Ayurvedic anthropology makes Ātman part of the definition of embodied life. Caraka defines life through the conjunction of Śarīra, Indriya, Sattva or Manas, and Ātman, while Suśruta's definition of health includes clarity or pleasantness of Ātman, senses and mind alongside bodily equilibrium.^[31,32] This framework neither equates the person with a physical organism nor treats the Self as detached from lived embodiment. It

provides the thesis with its strongest practical bridge between metaphysical reflection and health.

The thesis also considers selected scientific and interdisciplinary models. Neuroscience, psychology, theories of conscious access, integrated information, predictive processing, artificial intelligence and epigenetic accounts are not used as evidence for Ātman. Their role is comparative and delimitative: they explain aspects of embodiment, cognition, memory, self-modeling and the biological conditions of experience. The thesis maintains a strict distinction between such measurable processes and the metaphysical or first-person question represented by Ātman. The “hard problem of consciousness” is therefore relevant because it marks the difficulty of explaining why physical processing should be accompanied by subjective experience, without itself validating any classical metaphysical doctrine.^[33]

This article condenses the thesis into a journal format organized around its principal analytical sequence: methodology; Vedic and Upaniṣadic foundations; Indian Darśanas; Western doctrines; religious dimensions; Āyurveda; selected scientific perspectives; and comparative critical synthesis. The guiding research question is whether Ātman can remain a meaningful category for understanding consciousness, identity, moral agency and well-being when interpreted critically, comparatively and without reducing either philosophy to science or science to metaphysics.

2. Materials and Methods / Analytical Framework

The study uses a qualitative philosophical design. It contains no experimental intervention, statistical analysis, clinical observation, interview or questionnaire. Ātman is not approached as a measurable physical object but as a concept situated within metaphysics, consciousness, ethics, spiritual experience and theories of personhood. The methodological task is therefore to interpret textual claims, clarify technical concepts, compare philosophical positions and critically assess their explanatory strengths and tensions.

Four modes of analysis structure the research. First, conceptual analysis distinguishes terms that are easily conflated. Ātman, Jīva, Puruṣa, Manas, Buddhi, Ahaṁkāra, Chitta, soul, mind, ego, subject and consciousness may overlap, but they are not synonyms. The thesis repeatedly warns that translating Ātman simply as “soul” can import Greek, Christian or modern Western assumptions, just as the English word “mind” cannot automatically stand for Manas, Buddhi or Chitta. Conceptual clarification therefore precedes comparison.

Second, textual analysis interprets doctrines within their own argumentative contexts. Sāṃkhya describes Puruṣa as consciousness distinct from Prakṛti; Nyāya treats Ātman as a real substance and consciousness as a quality under specific conditions; Jainism regards consciousness

as intrinsic to Jīva; Buddhism rejects an eternal self-substance while explaining continuity through dependent causation; and Cārvāka denies a trans-sensible self. These positions cannot be responsibly compared unless their internal logic is first preserved.^[1,3,8,10]

Third, comparative analysis is thematic rather than merely historical. Traditions are set beside one another around common philosophical problems: the relation of self and body; self and consciousness; permanence and change; individual and universal reality; moral agency; liberation, salvation or freedom; knowledge; health; and scientific explanation. This permits comparisons such as Sāṃkhya and Cartesian dualism, Buddhist no-self and Humean bundle theory, or Cārvāka and materialist tendencies, while explicitly rejecting the claim that the paired doctrines are identical.

Fourth, critical evaluation examines the strengths and limitations of each model. The thesis asks whether a passive Puruṣa can meaningfully be an enjoyer, how an eternal self can become bound, how no-self theories preserve moral continuity, whether memory can adequately ground identity, whether dualism can explain mind-body interaction, and whether material explanations can account for subjective experience. This critical dimension is essential because the study is not a catalogue of doctrines but an assessment of their capacity to illuminate consciousness, responsibility, suffering and well-being.

The source base includes classical Indian texts and their translations, works on Indian philosophy, Ayurvedic Samhitās, religious sources, major Western philosophical texts and selected modern writings on consciousness. The study uses sources from Vedic and Upaniṣadic literature; Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta; Cārvāka, Jain and Buddhist traditions; Greek, Christian and modern Western philosophy; Caraka and Suśruta; and selected scientific discussions. Classical passages are cited by text and verse or section where available. Modern sources are cited in the present article using Vancouver-style numbering.

The methodology is explicitly bounded. It does not attempt to prove or disprove Ātman experimentally. It does not assume that all Eastern traditions accept an eternal self or that Western thought is uniformly materialist. It does not treat Ātman and soul as identical terms. Scientific theories are used only for careful comparison and are not presented as direct verification of metaphysical claims. These delimitations are central to the study’s academic integrity because they prevent both spiritual overstatement and reductionistic dismissal.

3. Vedic and Upaniṣadic Foundations of Ātman

3.1 From cosmic order to inward inquiry

The thesis presents the doctrine of Ātman as a historical and conceptual development rather than an idea that appears fully formed at the beginning of Indian thought.

Early Vedic materials are primarily concerned with sacred order, ritual, life, divine forces and the relation between human action and cosmos. They nevertheless establish the conditions within which a doctrine of self can arise. Four ideas are especially important: *Rta*, *Prāṇa*, *Puruṣa* and *Yajña*.

Rta denotes order, truth, rhythm, law and moral harmony. The philosophical significance of *Rta* for selfhood lies in the assumption that human actions occur within an ordered field of consequence. Once action is understood as morally meaningful, the questions of agency and continuity become unavoidable: who acts, who receives the fruit of action, and what makes responsibility intelligible through time? The thesis therefore treats *Rta* as an indirect precursor to later doctrines of karma and the moral subject.^[1]

Prāṇa represents breath, life and vital functioning. Early reflection can come close to identifying the living principle with breath because respiration distinguishes the living body from the corpse. Upaniṣadic inquiry, however, does not stop at vitality. *Prāṇa* becomes something upon which bodily and sensory activity depends, while *Ātman* is sought as the subject that knows breathing, life and experience. The movement from *Prāṇa* to *Ātman* is therefore a movement from animation to awareness: not merely “what keeps the organism alive?” but “who knows that life is occurring?”^[4]

The *Puruṣa Sūkta* offers a cosmic image of personhood:

सहस्रशीर्षा पुरुषः सहस्राक्षः सहस्रपात् ।
स भूमिं विश्रवतो वृत्वात्यतिष्ठद्दशङ्गुलम् ॥
— Rgveda 10.90.1

The thesis reads this symbolically rather than anatomically. *Puruṣa* represents a cosmic totality that both pervades and transcends the world. Although this hymn does not yet formulate the Upaniṣadic identity of *Ātman* and Brahman, it establishes a conceptual relation between personhood and cosmic reality that later texts internalize.^[5]

Yajña, or sacrifice, provides another transition. In early Vedic religion the sacrificial act organizes relations among human beings, divine powers and cosmic order. The Upaniṣadic turn increasingly interiorizes sacrifice: the decisive transformation moves from external ritual toward knowledge, discipline and inquiry into the knower. The thesis interprets this transition as philosophically significant because it redirects attention from the ritual act toward the agent, experiencer and witness of action.

3.2 The Upaniṣadic interiorization of the self

In the Upaniṣads the central philosophical direction changes from external cosmology to the structure of inward experience. The question becomes: what remains when body, senses, breath, mind and intellect are

distinguished from the deepest subject? The Upaniṣadic *Ātman* is not treated as ordinary personality or ego. It is progressively characterized as the inner Self or witness to changing states, and in major passages it is identified with or inseparably related to Brahman.^[2,4]

The *Kena Upaniṣad* illustrates the logic of this inward movement by asking after that through which the mind itself is known. The thesis emphasizes the difference between an object of cognition and the condition of cognition: if the mind can be observed, doubted or disciplined, then the knower cannot simply be equated with a particular mental content. This pattern becomes fundamental to later Yoga and Vedānta.

The *Mahāvākyas* condense the strongest Upaniṣadic claims about self and ultimate reality:

तत्त्वमसि — “That thou art.” (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7)
अहं ब्रह्मास्मि — “I am Brahman.” (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.10)
अयमात्मा ब्रह्म — “This Self is Brahman.” (*Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* 2)
प्रज्ञानं ब्रह्म — “Consciousness is Brahman.” (*Aitareya Upaniṣad* 3.1.3)

Within the thesis these statements are not slogans but metaphysical and experiential propositions. They connect inner selfhood with the deepest account of reality and thereby make knowledge of the self simultaneously a question about what is ultimately real.^[2] The significance is profound: the inquiry into identity ceases to be merely psychological. To know the Self is to challenge ordinary identification with body, status, memory and ego and to reinterpret the individual in relation to a larger reality.

The method of *neti neti*—“not this, not this”—protects the concept from being reduced to an object. If every observable or thinkable content can be distinguished from the subject to whom it appears, then *Ātman* cannot be described as one more item within experience. The method is negative because it removes false identifications rather than providing a conventional definition. The thesis also recognizes the critical difficulty this creates: if *Ātman* is beyond ordinary conceptualization, how can language successfully describe it? The symbolic and apophatic style of the Upaniṣads is therefore simultaneously a philosophical strength and an interpretative challenge.

3.3 Witness-consciousness, body and the layered person

The *Katha Upaniṣad*’s chariot analogy presents a structured account of the human being. The body is the chariot, the senses are the horses, the mind is the bridle, the intellect is the charioteer and the Self is the master of the chariot.^[4] The thesis gives this analogy particular importance because it neither denies embodiment nor collapses personhood into it. Body, senses, mind and intellect are necessary instruments, but they are

distinguishable from the deeper subject. Human life is therefore interpreted as layered and ordered rather than as a simple opposition between “body” and “soul.”

The Taittirīya Upaniṣad develops another layered model through the five kośas: Annamaya, Prāṇamaya, Manomaya, Vijñānamaya and Ānandamaya. These correspond to bodily, vital, mental, intellectual and bliss-related levels. The thesis stresses that the kośas are not themselves the Ātman; rather, they show why human existence cannot be exhausted by physical form or mental function alone.^[4] This layered anthropology later becomes particularly relevant to the article’s discussion of Āyurveda, where body, senses, mind and conscious principle are explicitly integrated.

The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad offers a different analysis through waking, dream, deep sleep and Turīya. Waking consciousness is outwardly oriented; dream consciousness is inwardly projected; deep sleep suspends ordinary differentiated cognition; and Turīya is described as the fourth, peaceful and non-dual, not reducible to the previous three states:

नान्तःप्रज्ञं न बहिःप्रज्ञं नोभयतःप्रज्ञं न प्रज्ञानघनं
न प्रज्ञं नाप्रज्ञम् । अदृष्टमव्यवहार्यमग्राह्यमलक्षणम्
अचिन्त्यमव्यपदेश्यमेकात्मप्रत्ययसारं प्रपञ्चोपशमं
शान्तं शिवमद्वैतं चतुर्थं मन्यन्ते स आत्मा स विज्ञेयः ॥
— Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad 7

The thesis interprets this passage as an attempt to distinguish awareness from any single empirical state. Ātman is not merely waking consciousness or the ordinary stream of thought; it is presented as that which underlies or witnesses changing modes of experience.^[2]

3.4 Immortality, karma, liberation and ethics

The Upaniṣadic Self is repeatedly described as not destroyed with the destruction of the body. The Katha Upaniṣad states:

न जायते म्रियते वा विपश्चिन्नायं कुतश्चिन्न बभूव कश्चित् ।
अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥
— Katha Upaniṣad 1.2.18

The same pattern appears in the Bhagavad Gītā’s formulation that the Self is unborn, eternal and not slain when the body is slain.^[12] The thesis emphasizes that such immortality should not be reduced to indefinite survival of the empirical ego. Its deeper purpose is to relocate identity beyond the mortal body and changing mental personality. This move supports the doctrines of karma and liberation by supplying a subject whose ultimate nature is not exhausted by one embodied state.

The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad’s image of two birds on the same tree further distinguishes empirical participation from witnessing awareness:

द्वा सुपर्णा सयुजा सखाया समानं वृक्षं परिषस्वजाते ।
तयोरन्यः पिप्पलं स्वाद्वत्यनन्नन्यो अभिचाकशीति ॥
— Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 3.1.1

One bird eats the fruit while the other observes. Within the thesis this becomes an image of the acting, experiencing self and the witnessing Self. The ethical and soteriological point is not passivity but freedom from mistaken identification. Bondage belongs to ignorance, attachment and the appropriation of experience as “I” and “mine”; liberation is associated with knowledge of the deeper Self.^[2]

The Upaniṣadic doctrine also carries ethical implications. The Īśā Upaniṣad links a vision of pervasive sacred reality with renunciation and non-covetous enjoyment. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka statement that fear arises from duality is interpreted as showing how narrow self-identification produces isolation and fear. Thus metaphysics is not separated from conduct. The doctrine of Self is supposed to transform the way one relates to possession, other beings and mortality.

The thesis nevertheless remains critical. The Upaniṣadic position raises difficult questions: how can the indescribable be known or spoken of? If Ātman is identical with Brahman, how is plurality explained? If the Self is actionless, what exactly bears karma? These tensions are not treated as reasons to dismiss the Upaniṣads. Rather, they explain why subsequent Indian Darśanas develop competing ontologies and epistemologies of selfhood.

4. Indian Darśanas: Competing Models of Selfhood

4.1 Āstika and nāstika as a field of internal debate

The Indian Darśanas transform the relatively open-textured Upaniṣadic language of self into systematic philosophy. The central achievement of this phase is not uniformity but argumentative differentiation. The orthodox systems—Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Pūrva Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta—accept Vedic authority but disagree about the ontological nature of the self, the status of consciousness and the path to freedom. The heterodox systems—Cārvāka, Jainism and Buddhism—reject Vedic authority and produce sharply divergent positions ranging from materialism to pluralistic soul-realism and no-self theory.^[1,3]

This diversity corrects the common assumption that Indian philosophy simply presupposes an eternal soul. The thesis instead shows an intellectual culture in which the self may be pure consciousness, a substance possessing consciousness, an agent of ritual and moral action, the individual related to Brahman, a plurality of Jīvas, an impermanent causal process, or the living body itself. What unifies the field is therefore not agreement about Ātman but the seriousness with which questions of consciousness, suffering, moral causation and liberation are pursued.

4.2 Sāṃkhya: Puruṣa as witness-consciousness

Sāṃkhya provides one of the clearest dualistic theories in the thesis. Reality is organized around two irreducible principles: Prakṛti and Puruṣa. Prakṛti is the dynamic but

unconscious source of material and psychical manifestation and is constituted by the three *guṇas*—*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. Body, senses, mind, ego and even *Buddhi* belong to the domain of *Prakṛti*. *Puruṣa* is distinct: conscious, inactive, witnessing and not itself a product of material nature.^[3]

The *Sāṃkhyakārikā* states:

संघातपरार्थत्वात् त्रिगुणादिविपर्ययादधिष्ठानात् ।

पुरुषोऽस्ति भोक्तृभावात् कैवल्यार्थं प्रवृत्तेश्च ॥

— *Sāṃkhyakārikā* 17

The thesis reads this verse as a compact group of arguments for *Puruṣa*: composites exist for another; the knower must differ from the three *guṇas*; experience requires a substratum; enjoyment presupposes an enjoyer; and the striving for liberation presupposes a subject for whom liberation is meaningful.^[6] These arguments distinguish the conscious witness from all psycho-physical instruments.

The strength of *Sāṃkhya* lies in refusing to identify consciousness with mind. Thoughts, sensations and decisions are part of *Prakṛti*; they are known, and therefore cannot simply be the ultimate knower. Bondage consists in the misidentification of *Puruṣa* with *Prakṛti* and its products; liberation or *kaivalya* arises through discriminative knowledge of their difference. This is one of the thesis's most important formulations of the distinction between consciousness and mental content.

The same sharpness creates the system's principal difficulty. If *Puruṣa* is entirely passive, how can it be an enjoyer or appear bound? If *Prakṛti* is unconscious, how does the relation between the two generate lived experience? The thesis treats this as an unresolved philosophical pressure point rather than a fatal flaw. *Sāṃkhya* remains valuable because it formulates with unusual precision the intuition that the witness of mental activity cannot be identical with that activity.

4.3 Yoga: from metaphysics to disciplined realization

Yoga adopts the *Sāṃkhyan* distinction between *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* but makes the question practical. Patañjali's well-known definition is:

योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥

— *Yoga Sūtra* 1.2

followed by:

तदा द्रष्टुः स्वरूपेऽवस्थानम् ॥

— *Yoga Sūtra* 1.3

The thesis interprets these two aphorisms as a complete statement of Yogic self-theory: Yoga is the cessation of the modifications of *Chitta*, and when these modifications cease, the seer abides in its own nature.^[7] Mental events are therefore not denied, but they are decentered. Thoughts, emotions, memories, desires and fears are modifications of the mental field rather than the essence of the Self.

Yoga's contribution is distinctive because it connects ontology with disciplined practice. *Avidyā*, *Asmitā*, *Rāga*, *Dveṣa* and *Abhiniveśa* describe the mechanisms through which the person becomes bound to false identity, attachment and fear. The eightfold discipline—*Yama*, *Niyama*, *Āsana*, *Prāṇāyāma*, *Pratyāhāra*, *Dhāraṇā*, *Dhyāna* and *Samādhi*—shows that self-realization is not reduced to intellectual assent. Ethical conduct, bodily regulation, breath, sensory restraint, concentration and meditation all participate in the clarification of consciousness.

For the thesis, Yoga provides a practical psychology of disidentification: one is not identical with every mental state simply because it is experienced. This is relevant to the broader comparative argument because many later theories equate selfhood with memory, thought or personality. Yoga instead asks whether those changing contents presuppose a deeper standpoint of witnessing. Its metaphysical dependence on *Sāṃkhya* remains open to criticism, yet its systematic account of mental regulation makes it central to the study's understanding of the relationship between mind and self.

4.4 Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika: the self as real substance

Nyāya approaches *Ātman* through epistemology and inference rather than mystical identity. The thesis emphasizes that *Nyāya* accepts multiple valid means of knowledge and argues for a real subject on the basis of phenomena such as desire, aversion, pleasure, pain, effort, cognition, memory and recognition. Memory is especially important because remembering a previous experience appears to presuppose continuity of the experiencer. Recognition—knowing a present object as the same object encountered earlier—also implies a subject capable of linking temporally separated cognitions.^[1]

Unlike *Advaita* or *Sāṃkhya*, *Nyāya* does not identify the essence of self with consciousness in the same way. Consciousness is treated as a quality that occurs when self, mind, senses and objects enter the relevant relation. This preserves a substantial self while allowing conscious episodes to vary. The thesis regards this as a logically rigorous alternative to witness-consciousness theories: rather than claiming that the self is pure awareness, *Nyāya* treats the self as that in which awareness and other psychological qualities occur.

Vaiśeṣika gives this view an ontological framework. The self is included among the real substances that make up reality. Individual selves are multiple and enduring, while consciousness is adventitious rather than constantly manifest. This model is important because it shows another form of realism about the self that differs both from *Advaita*'s pure consciousness and Buddhism's process account.^[1]

The critical tension is clear. By making consciousness a contingent quality, *Nyāya* and *Vaiśeṣika* preserve

substantial continuity but risk making the relation between the self and lived awareness less intimate. Their strength is systematic realism and logical argument; their weakness, as the thesis notes, is that the conscious dimension can appear secondary in a study whose central question is precisely the subject of experience.

4.5 Pūrva Mīmāṃsā: agency, dharma and continuity

Mīmāṃsā approaches selfhood through action and moral efficacy. If ritual and ethical actions produce consequences that may mature later, the agent and recipient of those consequences must possess sufficient continuity for responsibility to make sense. Selfhood is therefore tied to the performance of dharma and to the continuity of karmic result^[1,3]

This orientation contributes an important dimension to the thesis. The self is not only something that knows; it is also something that acts. A purely spectator model of consciousness can become detached from questions of duty and responsibility. Mīmāṃsā places the self within a structure of action and consequence, thereby strengthening the relationship between metaphysics and ethics. Its limitation is that the framework can appear strongly ritualistic, yet precisely for that reason it demonstrates that Indian theories of self cannot be reduced to contemplative mysticism.

4.6 Vedānta: identity, dependence and difference

Vedānta provides the most influential and internally diverse interpretations of Ātman's relation to Brahman. The thesis distinguishes Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita rather than treating Vedānta as a single doctrine.^[11]

Advaita identifies Ātman with Brahman and understands bondage as ignorance expressed through identification with body, senses, mind and ego. Ātman is not a substance that possesses consciousness; it is self-luminous consciousness. Liberation is therefore not the production of a new state but knowledge of what the Self already is. The Upaniṣadic Mahāvākyas become central because they express the identity between the innermost Self and ultimate reality.^[2,11]

Viśiṣṭādvaita preserves the reality of the individual self while placing it in a relation of dependence on Brahman. The individual is conscious and enduring but not absolutely identical with Brahman in the Advaitic sense. Dvaita maintains a still stronger distinction among God, individual souls and matter. In all three, the self remains central to liberation, but the meaning of liberation changes according to the metaphysical relation between individual and ultimate reality.

The thesis identifies Advaita's greatest strength as the radical philosophical depth of its account of consciousness and non-duality. Its principal challenge is explaining plurality and the experiential reality of the world without undermining the claim of ultimate non-

duality. Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita preserve individuality more clearly, but they give up Advaita's strict identity of self and Brahman. The internal diversity of Vedānta thus illustrates a larger thesis finding: even where traditions accept Ātman, they may disagree fundamentally about what it is and how it relates to ultimate reality.

4.7 Cārvāka: materialism within Indian philosophy

Cārvāka is essential to the thesis because it prevents the romantic portrayal of Indian philosophy as uniformly spiritualist. Cārvāka rejects a supersensible, immortal self, denies rebirth and gives primacy to perception as a valid basis of knowledge. Consciousness is explained through the living body rather than an independent soul; the classical analogy presented in the thesis compares consciousness to a novel property emerging from a combination of material elements.^[1]

The philosophical importance of Cārvāka is methodological as much as doctrinal. It demands a reason for affirming what cannot be directly perceived and thus supplies an indigenous materialist critique of Ātman. This makes later comparisons with scientific materialism possible without suggesting that materialist doubt is foreign to Indian thought.

Its weakness, according to the thesis, is explanatory. If consciousness is only a bodily product, the theory must still account for first-person experience, moral continuity and the normative dimensions that other systems connect with karma and liberation. Yet Cārvāka's refusal to multiply unseen entities gives the comparative study an indispensable critical counterweight.

4.8 Jainism: plural Jīvas, karma and purification

Jain philosophy strongly affirms the Jīva as conscious, enduring and multiple. Each living being possesses a soul, and bondage occurs through karma conceived within a distinctive material framework. Liberation consists in freeing the Jīva from karmic accretion through right faith, right knowledge and right conduct.^[8,9]

The Tattvārtha Sūtra condenses the path:

सम्यग्दर्शनज्ञानचारित्र्याणि मोक्षमार्गः ॥

— Tattvārtha Sūtra 1.1

The thesis emphasizes the ethical consequence of this pluralistic realism. Because living beings possess Jīva, ahimsā is not merely a social preference but follows from a metaphysical account of sentient life. Individuality and responsibility are preserved because liberation does not dissolve all selves into one universal Self.^[8,9]

Jainism therefore offers a model that stands between Advaita and Buddhism: it refuses both the absolute identity of all selves with Brahman and the denial of permanent selfhood. Its challenge lies in the doctrine of karmic matter, which is difficult to translate into modern philosophical or scientific categories. Nevertheless, the

system provides a powerful synthesis of consciousness, individuality, conduct and liberation.

4.9 Buddhism: anātman and continuity without substance

Buddhism supplies the most sustained Indian critique of permanent selfhood. The human person is analyzed through the five skandhas: form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. None is permanent, and no independent, unchanging Ātman is found beneath them.^[10] The doctrine is not presented in the thesis as nihilism. Buddhism retains experience, causation, moral responsibility, karma and liberation while rejecting a substantial self.

Dependent origination explains continuity through conditions rather than identity of essence. The thesis uses the formulation:

इदं अस्ति तस्मात् इदं भवति ।

इदं निरोधात् इदं निरुध्यते ॥

“When this exists, that comes to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases”.^[10] The person is therefore a causal stream, not an eternal substance. Continuity can be compared to one flame lighting another or a river that persists as a process despite constant change.

Buddhism raises penetrating questions for permanent-self theories. If the self is absolutely unchanging, how can it act? If it acts, does that not imply change? If it is untouched, how does it become bound? If it is eternally free, what exactly attains liberation? These questions compel the thesis to resist any uncritical acceptance of Ātman.

Buddhism faces a reciprocal difficulty: if no permanent self exists, how are karma, rebirth and responsibility coherently connected across time? The Buddhist answer is continuity without identity of substance. Whether this

is sufficient remains a philosophical question, but its critical value is substantial. The doctrine also shifts the practical aim away from discovering an eternal entity toward overcoming attachment to “I” and “mine.”

4.10 Critical synthesis of the Indian debate

Placed together, the Darśanas reveal that “Ātman in Indian philosophy” names a problem-field rather than one proposition. Sāṃkhya and Yoga identify selfhood with pure witness-consciousness; Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika defend a real substrate in which consciousness occurs; Mīmāṃsā emphasizes the agent of dharma; Vedānta analyzes identity, dependence or difference between self and Brahman; Cārvāka identifies consciousness with the embodied organism; Jainism affirms many conscious Jīvas; Buddhism denies a permanent self and replaces substance with causal continuity.^[1,3,8,10,11]

The relationship between self and consciousness therefore varies radically. Consciousness is intrinsic in Advaita, Sāṃkhya, Yoga and Jainism; a quality in Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika; embodied and emergent in Cārvāka; and impermanent within the Buddhist aggregate analysis. The relation between self and body varies just as sharply. The relation between self and liberation ranges from discriminative isolation to knowledge of Brahman, purification from karmic bondage, nirvāṇa, or rejection of liberation as a metaphysical project.

The thesis regards this internal plurality as a strength. Indian philosophy is not intellectually rich because it possesses one definitive answer, but because it keeps the questions of consciousness, agency, continuity and liberation open to argument. The existence of Cārvāka and Buddhism within the Indian philosophical landscape is especially important: critique of a permanent Ātman is not an external modern challenge but an indigenous part of the classical debate.

Table 1: Comparative positions on selfhood in major Indian systems.

Tradition	Self-concept	Consciousness	Primary soteriological/functional emphasis
Sāṃkhya/Yoga	Puruṣa as witness distinct from Prakṛti	Intrinsic to Puruṣa	Discrimination, stilling of Chitta, kaivalya
Nyāya/Vaiśeṣika	Ātman as enduring substance	Quality arising under conditions	Knowledge, release from suffering, continuity
Mīmāṃsā	Continuing agent and recipient of action	Associated with self	Dharma, agency and karmic consequence
Vedānta	Ātman in relation to Brahman	Central; pure consciousness in Advaita	Knowledge of self/Brahman; liberation
Jainism	Plural eternal Jīvas	Intrinsic to Jīva	Purification from karmic bondage
Buddhism	No permanent self; causal aggregates	Impermanent aggregate/process	Release from attachment and suffering
Cārvāka	Living body as self	Emergent bodily property	Material life; rejects supersensible self
Āyurveda	Ātman within embodied person	Conscious principle of living experience	Life, health and holistic well-being

Source: synthesized exclusively from the thesis discussion of Indian Darśanas and Āyurveda.^[1,3,8,10,11,31]

4.11 Modern Indian extensions

The thesis also follows the question of Ātman into modern Indian reflection. Vivekananda reformulates Advaitic selfhood in language of strength, fearlessness, dignity and practical transformation; the Self is not presented as a remote metaphysical abstraction but as the deepest basis of human possibility.^[13] A. Nagraj's Madhyastha Darshan, discussed under the themes of coexistence and value-based living, similarly attempts to connect self-understanding with relationship, social order, justice and resolved conduct.^[14] These modern extensions support an important theme of the thesis: knowledge of self is not complete if it has no consequence for how the person lives. They also guard against the assumption that Indian self-theory is necessarily world-denying. Even when liberation remains a central philosophical horizon, self-knowledge may be interpreted as a basis for service, ethical clarity, coexistence and practical life.

5. Western Doctrines of Soul, Self and Consciousness

5.1 From psyche to moral and rational selfhood

The thesis treats Western philosophy not as a unified contrast to Indian thought but as another long sequence of transformations in the meaning of selfhood. Early Greek reflection begins with nature and cosmos, but with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle the soul becomes a major philosophical concern. Socrates shifts attention toward care of the soul and moral self-examination. The self is important because the quality of life depends on the condition of the moral person, not merely on external possessions or status.^[15]

Plato presents the soul as immortal and closely related to the intelligible order of reality. His account gives the soul a moral and rational structure and separates its highest destiny from the changing body. The thesis recognizes a strong point of comparison with Indian traditions in the refusal to reduce the person to corporeality, while also noting that Platonic metaphysics and Indian doctrines of Ātman arise from different conceptual worlds.^[15]

Aristotle modifies this separation by describing soul as the form or actuality of the living body. Soul is not simply a second object housed inside the organism; it is the organizing principle by which a body is alive and capable of characteristic activities.^[16] This provides the thesis with an important embodied alternative to strict dualism. In comparative terms, Aristotle becomes especially significant when the study later considers Āyurveda, where life is likewise interpreted through an integrated relation rather than a simple opposition between body and conscious principle.

5.2 Christian thought: inwardness, creation and salvation

Medieval Christian philosophy reorients the problem of soul around God, creation, sin, immortality and salvation. Augustine gives special importance to inward

awareness and the soul's relation to God. The turn inward resembles the philosophical movement from external objects toward the subject, but its theological setting differs from the Upaniṣadic project: the soul remains a created being and does not become identical with God in the Advaitic sense.^[17]

Aquinas combines Aristotelian language of soul as the form of the body with Christian teaching on personal immortality.^[18] The thesis regards this as a more integrated conception than a model in which body and soul are wholly separable substances. Yet the ultimate framework remains theological. In Christianity, the soul is responsible before God and its destiny is connected with salvation rather than liberation from rebirth. The conceptual parallel with Indian soteriology is therefore real but limited.

5.3 Modern philosophy: certainty, substance and identity

The modern period changes the vocabulary from soul toward mind, subject and personal identity. Descartes makes the thinking self foundational: even radical doubt cannot remove the certainty that there is thinking. The self is therefore known most immediately as a thinking substance, distinct from extended body.^[19] The thesis recognizes the strength of this argument in making subjectivity philosophically primary, but it also notes that Cartesian dualism intensifies the problem of how two radically different substances interact.

Spinoza avoids Cartesian dualism by treating mind and body as attributes of one substance.^[20] In the thesis this is important because it shows that Western thought contains monistic strategies as well as dualistic ones. Leibniz, by contrast, presents a plural universe of monads coordinated through pre-established harmony.^[21] These positions demonstrate that the problem of unity and plurality, so central to Vedāntic debates, also appears in very different forms within Western metaphysics.

Locke places personal identity in relation to consciousness and memory.^[22] This creates a major shift from metaphysical substance to psychological continuity. The thesis values this model because memory is evidently important to identity, but it also raises the question of whether memory alone can sustain the unity of the person. If memory is fragmentary, fallible or absent, does the self disappear, or is there still a subject to whom remembered and forgotten experiences belong?

Berkeley affirms spirit while denying the independent reality of matter.^[23] Hume moves in the opposite critical direction: introspection does not reveal a substantial self, only a succession or bundle of perceptions.^[24] The comparison between Hume and Buddhism is one of the thesis's most useful thematic pairings because both challenge an enduring self-substance. Yet their purposes differ. Hume's position emerges from empiricist analysis, whereas Buddhist anātman functions within an

ethical and liberative discipline concerned with attachment and suffering. Similar conclusions cannot therefore be assumed to arise from identical philosophical motivations.

5.4 Kant, Hegel and Marx: transcendental, historical and social selfhood

Kant places strict limits on theoretical knowledge of the soul. The self cannot be known as a metaphysical substance in the manner of an ordinary object, yet a unity of apperception is required for coherent experience, and moral philosophy gives a decisive role to freedom and rational agency.^[25] The thesis interprets Kant as preserving the functional necessity of subjectivity while refusing speculative certainty about what the soul is in itself.

Hegel expands selfhood into history and recognition. Self-consciousness is no longer treated solely as an isolated inward substance; it develops through relations, historical processes and the wider movement of Spirit.^[26] Marx radicalizes the social and material dimension by situating consciousness within labor, social relations and material conditions.^[27] For the thesis, this shift is valuable because it corrects a possible weakness of overly inward accounts: human beings do not exist only as private consciousnesses but also within institutions, economic conditions, historical structures and social relationships.

5.5 The Western trajectory and its comparative significance

The thesis summarizes the Western development as a movement through several conceptual forms rather than a decline from spirituality to materialism. Soul appears as life-principle, moral personality, immortal rational being, form of the body, created spirit, thinking substance, personal identity, bundle of perceptions, transcendental unity, historical self-consciousness and socially conditioned consciousness. Each model preserves a different aspect of the human problem.^[15-27]

This trajectory differs from the dominant orientation of Indian philosophy. Indian systems frequently keep selfhood tied to karma, rebirth, suffering and liberation, while Western systems more often organize the problem around rational certainty, salvation, identity, knowledge, moral freedom, history and society. The thesis repeatedly insists that this is a general orientation, not an absolute dichotomy. Plato, Augustine, Aquinas and Descartes are not materialists; Cārvāka is not spiritualist; Buddhism is not a doctrine of eternal self; and modern Indian thought also engages ethics and society.

The comparative value of Western philosophy is therefore corrective and expansive. It forces an analysis of Ātman to confront memory, personal identity, epistemic certainty, embodied form, moral autonomy, historical recognition and material conditions. Conversely, the Indian traditions bring to the comparison

sustained attention to witness-consciousness, disciplined transformation, karma and liberation. The thesis's critical position is that neither tradition should be reduced to the other. Their conceptual differences are precisely what make comparison philosophically useful.

6. Religious Dimensions of Selfhood

Philosophical accounts of self become especially practical within religious traditions because they are connected with moral discipline, purification, salvation or liberation. The thesis examines Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, Christian, Islamic and Sikh understandings and identifies a shared concern with transformation despite major disagreements about the ontology of the self.

Hindu traditions connect Ātman with karma, dharma, rebirth and mokṣa. The Bhagavad Gītā reiterates the Upaniṣadic theme that the Self is not destroyed with the body:

न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचिन् नायं भूत्वा भविता वा न भूयः ।
अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥
— Bhagavad Gītā 2.20

The religious significance of such a passage is ethical and existential as much as metaphysical. Identity is relocated beyond bodily mortality, while action remains governed by dharma and karma.^[12] Depending on the Vedāntic school, liberation may be interpreted as realization of identity with Brahman, qualified dependence on Brahman, or an enduring relation of distinction.

Jain religious thought preserves the individuality of Jīvas and connects liberation with purification from karmic bondage. Right faith, right knowledge and right conduct form the path of liberation, and ahimsā receives deep metaphysical support from the conviction that living beings possess soul.^[8,9] The thesis treats this as a strong example of how ontology can produce an ethical stance: the nature of the self directly shapes one's relation to other life.

Buddhism presents a contrasting religious logic. Liberation does not require discovering an eternal Self; it requires seeing through the assumption of permanence and the attachment to "I" and "mine." The no-self doctrine is therefore therapeutic and soteriological rather than merely skeptical. Moral causation remains possible through continuity of dependent processes, even though no unchanging soul-substance is affirmed.^[10] This makes Buddhism especially important to the article's central argument that spiritual transformation does not logically require one single ontology of selfhood.

Christianity understands the soul within creation, sin, moral responsibility and salvation. The soul is related to God but is not God. Augustine's inwardness and Aquinas's account of the soul as the form of the body provide important philosophical elaborations of this framework.^[17,18,28] The thesis contrasts this with Advaita:

where Advaita can identify the deepest Self with Brahman, Christianity preserves the creator–creature distinction.

Islamic discussion is organized through concepts such as rūḥ and nafs, divine command, moral accountability and purification. The Qur’anic material cited in the thesis emphasizes the mystery of rūḥ and the possibility of the tranquil self returning to its Lord.^[29] The individual remains distinct from God, and the ethical life is framed through responsibility, discipline and judgment rather than identity with ultimate reality.

Sikh thought is presented through the language of divine light and the overcoming of ego. The thesis cites the Guru Granth Sahib:

ਸਭ ਮਹੀ ਜੋਤੀ ਜੋਤੀ ਹੈ ਸੋਇ ॥

— Guru Granth Sahib, p. 13

The religious emphasis lies in recognizing divine light within beings while dissolving haumai or ego through devotion and right living.^[30] As in other traditions, the doctrine of self is inseparable from the transformation of conduct.

Across these traditions the thesis identifies both convergence and divergence. Hinduism, Jainism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism maintain some form of enduring spiritual reality, although its relation to God or ultimate reality differs. Buddhism rejects a permanent self yet preserves moral and spiritual continuity. All place ethical significance on how the self is understood. The shared practical question is not simply “What is the soul?” but “How should a human being live, purify conduct and orient life toward a higher end?”

7. Āyurveda and Ātman: Conscious Embodiment and Holistic Health

7.1 Āyurveda as a science of life rather than body alone

Āyurveda provides the thesis with its most distinctive practical account of Ātman. In the philosophical systems, selfhood is discussed as witness, substance, agent, Jīva, Brahman-related reality or no-self. In Āyurveda the question is placed within the living person. The central concern becomes how the conscious principle participates in embodied existence, perception, health, disease, conduct and death. Ātman therefore moves from being only an object of metaphysical reflection to being one constituent of a medical anthropology.

Caraka defines life through the conjunction of four factors:

शरीरेन्द्रियसत्त्वात्मसंयोगो धारि जीवितम् ।

नित्यगश्चानुबन्धश्च पर्यायैरायुरुच्यते ॥

— Caraka Saṃhitā, Sūtrasthāna 1.42

The thesis translates this as the conjunction of body, senses, mind and Ātman that is called life, continuity and the living process.^[31] The importance of this definition

lies in its refusal of two extremes. Life is not reduced to a physical body, because the senses, mind and conscious principle are explicitly included. At the same time, health is not treated as a disembodied spiritual state, because diet, sleep, routine, tissues, channels, bodily constitution and environmental factors remain central to Āyurvedic practice.

The fourfold model—Śarīra, Indriya, Manas or Sattva, and Ātman—gives the thesis a structured account of the embodied person. Śarīra is the physical basis of life and is studied through doṣa, dhātu, mala, agni, srotas and prakṛti. Indriyas mediate between person and world. Manas attends, doubts, desires, coordinates and responds. Ātman is the conscious principle that makes experience meaningful. No single component can stand for the complete living being. The thesis therefore describes Āyurveda as a model of conscious embodiment rather than as either materialism or vague spiritualism.

7.2 Puruṣa, Chetanā and the living subject

The term Puruṣa changes meaning across Indian systems. In Sāṃkhya it is the transcendent witness distinct from Prakṛti. In Āyurveda it can refer to the embodied person who is actually treated—the living subject who eats, feels, remembers, suffers and heals. This therapeutic orientation is expressed through concepts such as the aggregate or composite person. The physician does not treat an abstract Ātman apart from bodily and mental life, nor a body stripped of subjectivity. The patient is an embodied conscious being.

Chetanā, or sentience, is closely related to this framework. The thesis does not claim that Āyurveda settles the philosophical dispute over whether consciousness is the essence or a quality of self. Its approach is functional: a living person is aware, responsive, sensitive, capable of memory, desire, pain, pleasure and purposive action. The body is the site in which these manifestations occur, yet embodied consciousness is not identified simply with anatomical structure. This allows the study to describe Āyurveda as holding an embodied spiritual realism: experience appears through bodily and mental instruments, but the conscious principle is not reduced to them.

This distinction also clarifies the place of Manas. The mind coordinates sensory input, attention, desire and response. It can be disturbed, disciplined and clarified. Ātman is not merely another mental faculty. In this respect, the Āyurvedic model resonates with the wider Indian distinction among body, senses, mind, intellect, ego and conscious subject. The thesis regards the preservation of these distinctions as philosophically useful because modern discussions often use “brain,” “mind,” “self” and “consciousness” without adequate conceptual separation.

7.3 Health as bodily, sensory, mental and conscious balance

Suśruta's definition of health is central to the thesis:

समदोषः समाग्निश्च समधातुमलक्रियः ।

प्रसन्नात्मेन्द्रियमनाः स्वस्थ इत्यभिधीयते ॥

— Suśruta Saṃhitā, Sūtrasthāna 15.41

A healthy person is described not only through balanced doṣas, agni, dhātus and malas, but also through a state of pleasantness or clarity of Ātman, senses and mind.^[32] The thesis interprets this as a genuinely holistic criterion. Health is not exhausted by laboratory-normal bodily variables if the person remains inwardly distressed, sensorially dysregulated or mentally agitated.

This does not mean that the metaphysical Ātman itself becomes diseased in the same way as a tissue or organ. The thesis explicitly recognizes the conceptual problem: if Ātman is pure witness, in what sense can it be described as “prasanna” or otherwise? The proposed reading is functional and anthropological. The complete embodied person can experience clarity or disturbance, and the language of a serene Ātman describes the quality of lived well-being within the whole person rather than pathology of an ultimate, immutable Self.

The health model also connects to psychosomatic understanding. Sensory use, mental states, desires, anger, fear, grief, habits and conduct can all affect the living person. The thesis values Āyurveda for integrating these dimensions instead of assigning body to medicine, mind to psychology, brain to neuroscience and values to ethics as if the domains were unrelated. Its scientific discussion of chronic stress likewise treats systemic and neurobiological effects as evidence that mental and bodily processes are deeply interdependent.^[43] The Ayurvedic person is simultaneously bodily, sensory, mental, ethical and conscious.

7.4 Karma, conduct, death and dignity of the patient

Āyurveda also places selfhood within a moral field. Conduct, self-control and disciplined living are relevant to health, and the wider Indian framework of karma gives human action continuity and significance. The thesis is careful, however, to warn against using karma fatalistically as an explanation of disease. Such an interpretation could blame the patient or weaken the responsibility for present treatment. A responsible Ayurvedic philosophy must therefore combine the karmic framework with compassion, effective intervention and emphasis on present action.

Death further reveals why Ātman matters to Ayurvedic anthropology. A body may retain structure but no longer be a living person. The distinction between living and dead form is therefore not merely anatomical; it concerns the disappearance of coordinated sentience and the conjunction that constitutes life. This does not constitute laboratory proof of a metaphysical entity. It shows only

that the classical Ayurvedic definition of life requires more than physical structure.

The practical ethical consequence is the dignity of the patient as a conscious subject. Treatment is directed toward someone who experiences pain, fear, hope and meaning, not merely toward a malfunctioning mechanism. The thesis treats this as a major contribution of Āyurveda to contemporary discussion: whatever one's metaphysical position, a medical model that remembers the subject of illness may resist depersonalization.

7.5 Critical evaluation of the Ayurvedic model

The thesis identifies five major strengths in the Ayurvedic account: holism; a direct relationship between consciousness and health; respect for the patient as a conscious being; inclusion of physical, mental, ethical and spiritual dimensions; and a basis for preventive and lifestyle-oriented care. Āyurveda occupies a junction between philosophy and medicine and therefore turns self-theory into an applied anthropology.

Its limitations are equally important. Ātman is not measurable as an organ or biological variable. The exact relation between Ātman and Manas is philosophically difficult. Karmic explanations can be misused. Spiritual anthropology must not be employed to reject effective modern medical interventions. The thesis therefore argues for complementarity rather than competition: scientific medicine can explain and treat bodily mechanisms with extraordinary precision, while the Ayurvedic framework contributes a wider account of the person as the subject of those mechanisms.

For the overall thesis, this Ayurvedic section is decisive. It prevents Ātman from remaining only a doctrine about ultimate reality or post-mortem destiny. Ātman becomes relevant to present life, conscious experience, self-regulation, ethical conduct and the definition of health. This makes Āyurveda the principal bridge between the classical philosophy of self and the article's contemporary concern with holistic well-being.

8. Selected Scientific and Interdisciplinary Perspectives

The scientific chapter of the thesis is deliberately cautious. It does not claim that neuroscience proves Ātman, that quantum theory validates Indian metaphysics, or that the inability to explain consciousness scientifically establishes a spiritual substance. Its purpose is to identify what contemporary models can explain and where the philosophical problem of subjectivity remains open.

Neuroscience demonstrates close dependence between ordinary conscious functions and the brain. Perception, memory, attention, emotion, planning and behavior correlate with neural systems; damage to particular circuits alters corresponding capacities. This provides powerful evidence for embodied consciousness.

Damasio's work, as presented in the thesis, is relevant because it ties selfhood to bodily regulation, emotion and feeling rather than treating the self as a purely abstract thinker.^[34] Llinás likewise emphasizes intrinsic brain activity, prediction and embodied interaction.^[35] Neither position is treated as proof against Ātman; rather, they clarify the biological mechanisms through which human experience is expressed.

Global Neuronal Workspace theory explains conscious access by proposing that information becomes conscious when it is globally available to multiple systems concerned with attention, memory, report, decision and action.^[36] The thesis draws only a cautious analogy with the Indian distinction between consciousness and mental modification. GNWT can explain how contents become available within a cognitive system; it does not, by itself, answer the metaphysical question of the witnessing subject.

Integrated Information Theory gives greater emphasis to the intrinsic unity and differentiation of experience and attempts to characterize consciousness in terms of integrated information.^[37,38] The thesis finds this significant because the theory begins from structural features of experience rather than merely behavioral report. Yet it remains a scientific theory about conditions under which systems may instantiate consciousness and should not be equated with Ātman.

Predictive processing and the free-energy principle offer another account in which the brain continuously models organism and environment.^[39] From the perspective of the thesis, such models may help explain the empirical or constructed sense of self. They do not necessarily settle whether the subject to whom such constructions appear is itself nothing more than the model. This distinction resembles the study's broader separation between ego, personality, mind and witness-consciousness.

Artificial intelligence intensifies the same question. Computational systems can reproduce increasingly complex intelligent functions, but the thesis distinguishes functional performance from subjective experience. The fact that a system can classify, predict, report or generate language does not by itself answer whether it possesses first-person awareness. The relevance to Ātman lies therefore in sharpening the conceptual difference between intelligence, information processing and conscious subjectivity, not in claiming that classical texts predicted artificial intelligence.

Epigenetics is treated with similar restraint. Environmental and experiential factors can influence biological expression.^[41,42] The thesis notes a loose analogy with the way Indian traditions speak of impressions and the shaping of embodied life, but it explicitly rejects the identification of epigenetic inheritance with karma or saṃskāra. The scientific concept operates within measurable biological

mechanisms, while karmic and metaphysical ideas belong to another explanatory level.

Quantum theories of consciousness are included because they are sometimes invoked in spiritual discussions, but the thesis is particularly cautious here. Hameroff and Penrose's Orch OR model is discussed as a scientific proposal about quantum-level processes related to consciousness, not as evidence for Ātman.^[40] The thesis treats claims that "quantum physics proves spirituality" as methodologically unacceptable.

The most important scientific issue in the article is the "hard problem of consciousness." Chalmers distinguishes explanations of function from the question of why physical processing is accompanied by subjective experience.^[33] The thesis sees a philosophical affinity—not an identity—between this problem and Indian inquiry into the knower. Scientific accounts can increasingly explain perception, access, memory, self-modeling and neural correlation. The unresolved question is why there is something it is like to undergo these processes at all.

The thesis therefore positions Ātman in the scientific age as a philosophical category of conscious subjectivity, not as a competing physical hypothesis. Science studies embodied mechanisms; Ātman, when critically reconstructed, names the first-person dimension that classical Indian traditions placed at the centre of inquiry. This reconstruction remains intentionally modest. It neither displaces neuroscience nor asserts that subjectivity is independent of the brain. It preserves the distinction between explaining the conditions of conscious life and explaining the fact of lived experience itself.

9. Comparative Results and Critical Discussion

9.1 Self and body

The body–self relation is one of the clearest points of comparison. Upaniṣadic, Sāṃkhyā and Yogic models distinguish the deepest self from the body. Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika and Mīmāṃsā also preserve a subject beyond bodily structure, though they conceptualize consciousness differently. Jainism treats the Jīva as embodied through karmic bondage. Buddhism denies a permanent self but still analyzes bodily form as one element within a changing aggregate. Cārvāka alone takes the living body as the basis of self and consciousness.^[1,3,8,10]

Western positions span a similarly broad range. Plato strongly distinguishes soul from body; Aristotle integrates soul as the form of the living body; Christian thought preserves both embodiment and a soul whose destiny exceeds bodily death; Descartes separates thinking and extended substances; Spinoza reconceives mind and body as attributes of one reality.^[15-20] Modern neuroscience then adds overwhelming evidence that ordinary cognition and consciousness are embodied in brain function. The thesis therefore rejects both crude

reductionism and crude disembodiment. A defensible account must acknowledge that human consciousness is embodied while still asking whether embodiment exhausts subjectivity.

Āyurveda provides the article's preferred integrative model at this level. Life is the conjunction of body, senses, mind and Ātman. The components are distinguishable but function together.^[31] This avoids treating the body as irrelevant to the Self while also refusing to equate the person with anatomy alone.

9.2 Self and consciousness

Consciousness is the common problem across almost all doctrines, even when the existence of a permanent self is denied. In Advaita, Ātman is pure consciousness; in Sāṃkhya and Yoga, Puruṣa is witness-consciousness; in Jainism consciousness belongs intrinsically to Jīva; in Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika it is a quality of the self; in Buddhism Vijñāna is one impermanent aggregate; and in Cārvāka it emerges from embodied material organization.^[1,3,8,10,11]

Western philosophy similarly ranges from the soul's rational and moral capacities to the Cartesian thinking subject, Locke's conscious continuity, Hume's stream of perceptions and Kant's transcendental unity.^[19,22,24,25] Contemporary consciousness studies further distinguish conscious access, information integration, prediction, self-modeling and neural correlation.^[33,36-39]

The thesis's key finding is that explanation of conscious function does not automatically explain conscious subjectivity. The distinction should not be used to declare materialism false or Ātman proven. It simply marks the philosophical residue that persists after functional description. Ātman remains relevant because it belongs to a tradition that begins precisely from the first-person fact of awareness.

9.3 Permanence, change and continuity

The problem of identity through change sharply divides the traditions. Upaniṣadic and Vedāntic models seek an unchanging ground beneath experience. Sāṃkhya preserves an unchanging Puruṣa. Jainism maintains enduring individual Jīvas. Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika posit continuing selves that support memory and recognition. Buddhism rejects this move and explains continuity without permanent substance. Cārvāka ties continuity to bodily life.^[1,3,8,10]

Western debate reproduces the tension in other forms. Plato and Christian thinkers affirm survival beyond bodily death. Descartes defends an enduring thinking substance. Locke gives memory a central role in personal identity. Hume finds no permanent self beyond perceptions, while Kant makes unity necessary for experience without claiming theoretical knowledge of soul-substance.^[15,17-19,22,24,25]

The thesis does not resolve this controversy by declaration. Instead, it identifies the explanatory trade-off. Substantial-self theories explain continuity but must show how an unchanging entity participates in changing action and experience. Process theories explain change but must account for responsibility, memory and the felt unity of life. This tension is one of the most important results of the comparative analysis.

9.4 One self, many selves and ultimate reality

Advaita's identification of Ātman and Brahman represents the strongest non-dual position. Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita retain greater individuality. Sāṃkhya and Jainism affirm multiple Puruṣas or Jīvas. Buddhism denies a permanent self; Cārvāka rejects a supersensible one. Western thought likewise ranges from individual immortal souls to Spinozistic monism and Hegelian accounts of Spirit.^[11,20,26]

The comparison is especially illuminating in religion. Christianity and Islam distinguish the individual soul from God; Sikhism affirms divine light while emphasizing the overcoming of ego; Jainism does not depend on a creator God; Buddhism does not make a creator deity central to liberation.^[8-10,28-30] The thesis therefore warns against using "union with God," "Brahman-realization," "salvation" and "liberation" as if they were equivalent experiences described in different languages.

9.5 Self, morality and responsibility

The self becomes philosophically urgent when action has consequences. Karma in Hindu, Jain, Buddhist and Mīmāṃsā contexts, sin and salvation in Christianity, accountability in Islam, Kantian moral freedom, Socratic care of the soul and Marxist attention to social action all connect subjectivity with responsibility. Even Buddhism, which denies a permanent self, preserves moral continuity through causal process.^[9,10,15,25,27-29]

This finding undermines the idea that metaphysical theories of self are merely speculative. They shape answers to practical questions: who is responsible, whether the consequences of action belong to the same person, whether conduct can purify or degrade the agent, and what kind of transformation is possible. The thesis regards this moral dimension as one reason the problem of self cannot be confined to cognitive science alone.

9.6 Liberation, salvation and freedom

Indian philosophies most characteristically frame selfhood soteriologically. Sāṃkhya seeks kaivalya through discrimination of Puruṣa and Prakṛti; Yoga seeks the seer's abiding in its own nature; Advaita understands liberation through knowledge of Ātman-Brahman identity; Jainism seeks freedom from karmic bondage; Buddhism seeks nirvāṇa through insight into impermanence and no-self. Even where the ontology differs, the question "what is the self?" is inseparable from "what must be overcome for freedom?"^[6-11]

Western traditions frequently formulate the higher end differently: salvation, rational autonomy, knowledge, moral integrity, historical recognition or freedom from alienating conditions. The thesis does not rank these goals but uses them to show that self-theory is shaped by what a tradition believes human fulfillment consists in.

9.7 Mind, ego and the witness

One of the thesis's strongest Indian contributions is the fine distinction among mental functions and the Self. Manas, Buddhi, Ahamkāra and Chitta are not automatically equivalent to Ātman. Yoga's Seer stands beyond Chitta-vṛttis; Sāṃkhya places mind and intellect within Prakṛti; Vedānta distinguishes ego-identification from pure consciousness; Āyurveda makes Manas the mediator between senses and the conscious person.^[3,7,11,31]

Modern Western philosophy often places more explanatory weight on mind, memory and personal identity, though Hume's critique and Kant's transcendental analysis complicate any simple equation. The thesis argues that the Indian distinction between mind and witness may contribute to contemporary conceptual clarity, provided it is not presented as an empirically established fact.

9.8 Self and health: the Ayurvedic contribution

The relation between selfhood and health is where the thesis makes its most original integrative move. Philosophical and religious traditions often discuss the soul in relation to knowledge, morality or ultimate destiny. Āyurveda places the conscious subject inside the definition of present life and health. Caraka's fourfold conjunction and Suśruta's inclusion of Ātman, senses and mind in health make selfhood therapeutically relevant.^[31,32]

This model contributes a concept of the patient as a conscious person rather than an isolated body. The thesis does not claim that the model scientifically proves a non-physical Self. Its contribution is anthropological and clinical-philosophical: well-being has a first-person dimension that cannot be replaced by third-person measurement alone.

9.9 Similarities and differences between Eastern and Western doctrines

The thesis identifies several broad similarities. Both traditions recognize a significant inner dimension of human life. Both connect selfhood with morality. Both contain dualistic and monistic tendencies. Both debate immortality. Both struggle with body-self relations. Both possess internal critics who reject substantial soul theories. These similarities show that reflection on selfhood arises wherever human beings confront life, death, responsibility, knowledge and purpose.

The differences are equally decisive. Indian traditions more consistently connect selfhood with karma, rebirth

and liberation. Advaita can identify Ātman with universal Brahman, whereas Christianity and Islam preserve a creator-creature distinction. Many Indian systems distinguish mind from Self more sharply than modern Western accounts that identify selfhood with thinking or memory. Buddhist anātman is an existential and therapeutic doctrine, while Hume's bundle theory arises from empiricism. Āyurveda directly includes selfhood within health, a feature less central to the philosophical history surveyed in the West. From Hegel and Marx onward, Western thought also gives history and social conditions a prominence less characteristic of many liberation-centered Indian systems.^[10,22,24,26,27,31,32]

9.10 Critical synthesis

No single theory examined in the thesis completely resolves the problem of self. Materialism explains embodiment and protects inquiry from unfalsifiable speculation but risks leaving subjectivity, meaning and value inadequately described. Spiritualism protects the irreducibility of consciousness and moral depth but can understate embodiment. Dualism preserves difference between consciousness and matter but struggles to explain their relation. Monism solves some interaction problems but must account for individuality and plurality. Substance theories support continuity but must explain change; process theories explain change but must account for unity and responsibility. Scientific theories illuminate mechanism but do not, within the thesis, eliminate the first-person problem.

From these tensions the study proposes a measured reconstruction. The empirical self—body, personality, emotion, memory and social identity—is demonstrably changing. Human consciousness is embodied and closely linked to brain and bodily function. Yet subjective awareness remains the indispensable standpoint from which any theory, observation or experience is encountered. Moral life presupposes some form of agency or continuity sufficient for responsibility. Human traditions repeatedly orient life toward transformation, whether described as liberation, salvation, wisdom, integration or freedom.

Accordingly, the thesis suggests that Ātman need not be treated as a hidden physical substance or as a scientific object. It may be retained as a philosophical category for the deepest dimension of conscious subjectivity and spiritual identity. Such a category must remain in dialogue with embodiment, psychology, society and science rather than isolating itself from them. This formulation preserves the conceptual depth of Indian traditions while accepting the critical force of Buddhism, Cārvāka, Humean skepticism and modern scientific explanation.

10. Major Findings, Contributions and Limitations

The first major finding is that no simple equation can be made between Ātman and body, mind, memory, ego, soul or consciousness. The thesis consistently

distinguishes these concepts. Most Indian systems other than Cārvāka separate selfhood from the physical body, but they disagree over whether consciousness is the essence of self, a quality of self, an impermanent process or an embodied product. Western doctrines likewise range from strong soul-body distinction to integrated hylomorphic models, psychological continuity and material social accounts.

Second, consciousness is the common denominator of the debate even when permanent Ātman is denied. Advaita, Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Jainism, Nyāya, Buddhism and Cārvāka all need to explain awareness, but they do so through incompatible ontologies. This makes consciousness the most productive comparative axis in the thesis.

Third, Indian philosophy is internally self-critical. Buddhism and Cārvāka prevent any claim that Indian thought uniformly accepts an eternal Self. Jainism prevents the reduction of all spiritual models to monism. Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika show that Indian self-theory includes logical realism as well as contemplative metaphysics. This diversity is a finding in its own right.

Fourth, Western philosophy is equally irreducible to materialism. Plato, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Berkeley and Kant give serious non-material or non-reductive accounts, while Hume and Marx critically transform the concept of self. The Western contribution lies especially in analyses of rationality, identity, memory, morality, history and society.

Fifth, religious traditions give theories of self a practical ethical direction. Whether the key concept is Ātman, Jīva, soul, naḥ, rūḥ or no-self, the question is joined to purification, discipline, responsibility and a higher goal. The metaphysics vary, but self-transformation is recurrent.

Sixth, Āyurveda makes the thesis distinctive by connecting Ātman with life and health. The person is defined through body, senses, mind and conscious principle. Health is likewise described as both bodily balance and a state involving mind, senses and Ātman.^[31,32] This turns a classical metaphysical question into a practical anthropology of the patient.

Seventh, science is both essential and limited within the thesis. Neuroscience and psychology greatly clarify embodied cognition and selfhood; models of conscious access and information integration generate testable explanations; epigenetics shows how environment affects biology; artificial intelligence sharpens the distinction between performance and experience. None of these, as used in the thesis, either proves or disproves metaphysical Ātman. Their value is to prevent vague spiritual claims and to identify more precisely what remains philosophical.

The study's principal contribution is therefore integrative rather than doctrinal. It brings Vedic, Upaniṣadic, Darśanic, religious, Ayurvedic, Western and scientific discussions into one analytic frame without claiming that their key terms are identical. It also gives Āyurveda a central position that is often absent from general philosophical discussions of selfhood.

The limitations follow from the same breadth. The work is textual and philosophical, not experimental. It cannot cover every thinker or tradition in equal depth. Translation across Sanskrit, Greek-derived, theological and modern psychological vocabularies remains imperfect. Only selected scientific theories are considered. The study is primarily focused on Indian and Western intellectual histories and does not claim global comprehensiveness. Finally, the concept of Ātman remains difficult to test by ordinary empirical criteria, so its contemporary value must be argued philosophically rather than asserted as scientific fact.

11. CONCLUSION

The thesis concludes that the question of Ātman remains a serious inquiry into what it means to be human. The concept cannot be responsibly reduced to body, brain, mind, memory, ego or social role, yet it also cannot be discussed as though embodiment, psychology, society and science were irrelevant. The strongest interpretation emerging from the comparative study is therefore neither crude substance-metaphysics nor reductive materialism.

Vedic and Upaniṣadic traditions move from cosmic order, life-breath and ritual toward inward investigation of the experiencer. The Indian Darśanas then turn that investigation into a rigorous debate: Puruṣa as witness, Ātman as substance, self as moral agent, Ātman in relation to Brahman, plural Jīvas, material consciousness and no-self. Western traditions broaden the problem through reason, moral personality, salvation, mind, memory, identity, historical recognition and social materiality. Religious traditions make the self a site of ethical transformation. Āyurveda connects the conscious principle with the very definition of life and health. Scientific approaches explain increasingly detailed mechanisms of embodied consciousness while leaving open the philosophical status of subjective experience.

Within these boundaries, Ātman remains meaningful as a category of conscious subjectivity and spiritual identity. Its value does not depend on treating it as a measurable physical entity. Rather, it lies in preserving the question of the subject who experiences, acts, suffers, remembers, seeks freedom and receives care. The article therefore supports the thesis's central position: the study of Ātman is not merely an inquiry into an ancient doctrine but an interdisciplinary philosophical inquiry into consciousness, moral responsibility, human continuity and holistic well-being.

Declarations

Ethics statement: This study is textual, philosophical and comparative in nature and involved no human participants, interviews, questionnaires or clinical experimentation.

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