

CHAPTER-II
CONCEPT OF LIBERATION

CHAPTER 2

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Liberation, implying a sense of "deliverance" or "freedom", is an important philosophical concept in the area of Philosophy of Religion and Political Philosophy. Philosophy of Religion studies it for explicating human suffering and bondage, on the one hand, and moral and spiritual ways and means of deliverance or freedom, on the other. In many religio-philosophical traditions, the concept of liberation is understood as a release, deliverance, freedom or transformation from an undesirable state or condition. It is also understood as a favourable condition in which human well-being and fulfillment of individual as well as community life, in relation to nature and God, can be possible. Political Philosophy, while engages itself with the concept of liberation concerns itself with the human struggle for peace and justice, the ideologies governing racial, ethnic and class struggles for freedom and the socio-cultural, economic and political structures which favour or threaten the integrity of the people and their land.

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to analyse philosophically the concept of liberation itself. This, for the simple reason that the concept of liberation in the Garo religious tradition, though it may lack a philosophical framework, is not devoid of significance. This significance however is couched in the myths, spiritual visions, religious beliefs and

practices, cultural revolutions, social aspirations, economic activities, traditional laws, folk-music and dances of the people concerned. Each of these may admit several layers of interpretation, however invariably each has a liberative significance, howsoever obscured by the prelogical language and poetical fancies. Yet, I shall analyse the concept of liberation not quite generally but with special reference to the views of Hindu Philosophy and Buddhist Philosophy. My choice of these two philosophical traditions has a certain justification: Both the philosophies, while belonging to the Eastern tradition, to which the Garo tradition also may be said belonging, have a great deal on the concept of liberation, as the ultimate goal of human life, in particular, and the whole cosmic order, in general; and the same is viewed as the aim of religion and philosophy. Now, among the conceptual schema of these philosophical traditions, the Garo concept of liberation may find its place.

1. Liberation in Hinduism

Hinduism is one of the oldest and most complex religious traditions of the world. Most of its adherents live in Indian sub-continent. It has no historical personality or event at its centre to date its origin. Sir Charles Eliot once wrote: "Hinduism has not been made, but it has grown".¹ S. Radhakrishnan gave the similar opinion, " It is clear that Hinduism is a process, not a result: a growing tradition, not a fixed revelation".² In the process of its growth Hinduism has spawned a variety of sects holding

¹ Sir Charles Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, Vol. I (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1926), p. 41.

² S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Religions* (New Delhi: Vision Books Private Limited, 1979), p. 69.

diverse belief-systems and ritual practices. Philosophically also it has various *darsanas*, the philosophical schools, exhibiting a rich variety of approaches and interests. There are six classical schools of philosophy in Hinduism. They are *Nyaya*, *Vaisesika*, *Sankhya*, *Yoga*, *Purva-Mimamsa* and *Uttara-Mimamsa (Vedanta)*. However, since Hinduism claims to be one of the most tolerant religious traditions of the world, sometimes other schools, like *Carvaka*, which is materialistic and does not accept the authority of the *Vedas*, the most sacred Hindu scriptures, are also included in Hinduism.

In general, the *Vedas* are the original sources of Hindu thoughts. However, almost all the Hindu schools of Philosophy have established their respective systems particularly on Upanishads.³ The concept of *Moksha* (liberation) is one of the basic problems that has kept all the Hindu schools of philosophy engaged in one way or other. Sri Swami Sivananda writes:

The six schools of thought are like six different roads which lead to one city...The methods or ways of approach to the Goal are different to suit people of different temperaments, capacities and mental calibre. But they all have one aim, viz., removal of ignorance and its effects of pain and sufferings and the attainment of freedom, perfection, immortality and eternal bliss by union of the individual soul (*Jivatman*) with the Supreme Soul (*Paramatman*).⁴

While observing comparatively between the Ancient Indian Philosophy and the Contemporary Indian Philosophy, Basant Kumar Lal also states somewhat more elaborately but the similar opinion :

³ Shauntala Rao Shastri, *Aspirations from a Fresh World* (Bombay: Bharatya Vidya Bhavan, 1961), p. 177.

⁴ Shri Swami Sivananda, *All About Hinduism* (Shivanandanagar: The Devine Life Society, 1977), p. 217.

Ancient Indian Philosophy is said to be based on, what can be called, a tragic sense of life. It somehow believes that life is full of suffering. The Contemporary Indian thinker acknowledges the reality of suffering and speaks about the possibility of an escape from it; and yet he approaches the problem in a different way. He gives to life a meaning and purpose and makes it an aspect of the process of spiritual growth.⁵

The most profound and popular among the Hindu schools of philosophy is the *Vedanta*. The term "*vedanta*", literally, means "the end of the *Vedas*", with special reference to the *Upanisads*, *Brahmasutra* and *Bhagavadgita*, and it is now generally taken to mean the summary or substance of the *Vedas*. In the process of its long history, there have emerged many great philosophers and distinctive traditions associated with them, within this school of philosophy. The most reputed traditions are *Advaita-Vedanta* and *Visistavaita*, associated with their great exponents, namely Sankara and Ramanuja respectively.

Sankara, the great Hindu philosopher-theologian of the eighth century A.D., had enormous religio-philosophical writings to his credit. It is said that though he lived for only 32 years, he had written no less than 312 treatises. He not only made commentaries on the principal *Upanisads*, *Brahmasutra* and *Bhagavadgita*, but produced two major philosophical works: the *Upadesasahasri* and *Vivekacudamani*. He had also written many poems, hymns, prayers and minor works on *Vedanta*.⁶ Sankara's philosophical tradition, *Advaita-Vedanta*, is always referred to as "Non-

⁵ Basant Kumar Lal, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1999), p. XIII.

⁶ Sabapathy Kulandran, *The Concept of Transcendence* (Madras: CLC, 1981), p. 110; Swami Prabhavananda, *Spiritual Heritage of India* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1981), p. 282.

dualism" or "Non-difference". S. Radhakrishnan, in the introduction of his commentary on *Bhagavadgita*, precisely summarizes the philosophical stance of Sankara in the following words:

Sankara affirms that Reality or *Brahman* is one without a second. The entire world of manifestation and multiplicity is not real in itself and seems to be real only for those who live in ignorance (*avidya*). To be caught in it is the bondage in which we are all implicated. This lost condition cannot be removed by our efforts. Works are vain and bind us firmly to this unreal cosmic process (*samsara*) the endless chain of cause and effect. Only the wisdom that the universal reality and the individual self are identical can bring us redemption. When this wisdom arises, the ego is dissolved, the wandering ceases and we have perfect joy and blessedness.⁷

In his commentary on *Upanisads*, *Brahmasutra (Vedantasutra)* and *Bhagavadgita*, and *Vivekacudamani*, one of his major philosophical works, Sankara had made elaborate descriptions of the Hindu conception of *moksha* (liberation). According to Sankara's *Advaita-Vedanta*, there is hardly any demarcation line between the achievement of the true knowledge of the Ultimate Reality and the attainment of liberation. Because in his system of philosophy, an individual self (*jiva*) can attain liberation (*moksha*) only when it has gained the true knowledge of the Ultimate Reality. The *Advaita-Vedanta* admits but One Ultimate Reality. *Brahman*, the Universal Self alone, is the Ultimate Reality. The whole cosmic order, the manifestation and multiplicity, including human being, is not absolutely real in itself; it is either relatively real or derivative, dependent for its existence on the Ultimate Reality - on *Brahman* (God).⁸ *Advaita-Vedanta*

⁷ S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita* (Bombay: Blackie & Sons (India) Ltd., pp. 16-17.

⁸ Sri Swami Sivananda, *All About Hinduism*, pp. 174-176; Swami Prabhavananda, *Spiritual Heritage of India*, pp. 283-284.

speaks of three distinctive levels of reality. In the first place, the *Pratibhasika* level of reality (illusory or non-existent). The classical example of this level of reality are that of "son of a barren woman" or that of "sky-flower", which do not exist or will never exist. Secondly, there is the *Vyavaharika* level of reality (empirical or phenomenal). To illustrate this, Sankara had used the simile of the rope and the snake. The rope is not non-existent, but one may superimpose the reality of the snake on the rope. The rope is certainly more real than the "son of a barren woman, but it is not the snake as it was supposed. The world of manifestation and multiplicity belongs to this level of reality. Then finally, there is *Paramarthika* level of reality (absolute or Ultimate). *Brahman* alone belongs to this level of reality.⁹

The *Advaita-Vedanta* also maintains the identity or non-duality between the Universal Self (*Brahman*) and the individual self (*Atman*). Its watchword is the *Upanisadic* formula of "*Tat Tvam Asi*" (That Thou art). Just as the bubbles becomes one with the ocean when it bursts, just as the pot-ether becomes one with the universal ether when the pot is broken, so also the individual or empirical self (*Atman*) becomes one with *Brahman* when it gets the true knowledge of the Ultimate Reality (*Brahman*). When the true knowledge dawns in the consciousness of the individual self (*jiva*) through annihilation of *Avidya* (ignorance), it is freed from its individuality and finitude and realizes its essential *Sat-Chit-Ananda* (Real Existence -

⁹ Chandradar Sharma, *Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979), pp. 274- 275.

Consciousness - Bliss), the absolute oneness with the Universal Self (*Brahman*). When an individual soul sees the Supreme Soul, the Universal Self, in himself and the whole universe, he is said to have come to the true knowledge so as to attain liberation (*moksha*). Here, the state of liberation is perceived as when the knower, the individual self, becomes known, the Universal Self (*Brahman*). The *Advaita-Vedanta* affirms no difference between the knower (individual self) and the Known (Universal Self), in its ultimate sense. In fact it asserts that there is no difference between the knower, known and the knowledge, in the context of liberation. Because the Ultimate Reality is one without a second. Knowing *Brahman*, as It is in Itself - in the *Paramarthika* level of reality - is not possible by objectifying It, but it is possible only by way of becoming one with *Brahman*. It is rather self-realizing or experiencing its true nature. Its oneness or identity with *Brahman*, the Universal Self by the individual self.¹⁰

The state of liberation (*moksha*), according to the *Advaita-Vedanta*, is not only gaining the true knowledge of *Brahman*, the Universal Self, and the absolute oneness of *Atman*, the individual self, with *Brahman*, but it is also to be noted that the liberation is from the false knowledge or ignorance (*avidya*) and its consequences. There are people who come to the conclusion that liberation in Hinduism is the release, deliverance or freedom from the *karma-samsara* (the endless cycle of birth and death, determined by action), and this phenomenon of the *karma-samsara* itself is

¹⁰ Vedanta-Sutras with the Commentary by Sankaracarya in George Thibaut (trans.), *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 34 & 38 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1962).

considered as the bondage, from which every individual human being is longing or struggling to be liberated. However, the *Advaita-Vedanta* asserts that the *karma-samsara* itself is determined by *avidya*, ignorance concerning the true nature of the Ultimate Reality. It holds the view that the *Upanisads* show insights, in many ways, into the truly human predicament: man is threatened by fear and hunger, old age and diseases, death and rebirth; the satisfaction given by wealth and health, family and long life, name and fame does not suffice; there is deeper want and lacking in man. That at the root of all human misery is the ignorance (*avidya*) of the true nature of the Self (*Atman-Brahman* identity). This estrangement from the real Self, the source and ground of all beings and things, is the tragedy and bondage of mankind and the chaos of whole creation. The *avidya* (ignorance), by concealing or obscuring the Truth, causes man to move farther away from the Ultimate Reality; it causes in man the egoism, individuality, selfishness and greed, which in turn causes wrong action and enhances his cycle of birth and death. Only the true knowledge, *Brahma-Vidya* (true realization of *Brahman*), enables man to come nearer to the Self by removing the veil of ignorance (*avidya*).¹¹

Although there are traditionally prescribed three ways towards achieving *moksha* (liberation) in Hinduism: *Karma Marga*, the way of action; *Bhakti Marga*, the way of devotion; and *Jnana Marga*, the way of knowledge, by temperament, Sankara inclined towards the *Jnana Marga*.

¹¹ Swami Prabhvaananda, *Spiritual Heritage of India*, pp 291-295; S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962), pp. 542-547.

But, it does not mean that Sankara's *Advaita-Vedanta* is completely rejecting the other *Margas* : *Karma Marga* and *Bhakti Marga*. Sankara's inclination towards the way of knowledge is not in its exclusiveness but only in emphasis. He maintained the *Karma Marga* and *Bhakti Marga* as subsidiaries to the *Jnana Marga*, or as means towards self-realization of the individual self concerning its identity and oneness with the Universal Self, with *Brahman* and other fellow creatures or beings. In his *Vivekacudamani* (Crest-Jewel of Discrimination), one of his major philosophical works, Sankara had emphasized the selfless devotion and service as the means to remove ignorance and achieve the true knowledge:

The spiritual seeker who is possessed of tranquility, self-control, mental poise and forbearance, devotes himself to the practice of contemplation, and meditates upon the *Atman* within himself as the *Atman* within all beings. Thus he completely destroys the sense of separateness which arises from the darkness of ignorance, and dwells in joy, identifying himself with *Brahman*, free from distracting thoughts and selfish occupations. Be devoted to *Brahman* and you will be able to control your senses. Control your senses and you will gain mastery over your mind. Master your mind, and the sense of ego will be dissolved. In this manner, the *yogi* achieves an unbroken realization of the joy of *Brahman*. Therefore let the seeker strive to give his heart to *Brahman*¹².

It is in this aspect of liberation, Sankara's *Advaita-Vedanta* also affirms that, through selfless devotion and service, a man can experience his own gradual liberation. That is, the liberation (*moksha*) can be attained gradually even while the individual self is in the embodied state, till it attains the final stage of liberation. Just as the wheel of a potter remains moving even after the pot is made, a person may go on living for some

¹² Sankara, *Vivekacudamani*, translated by Swami Madhavananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1975), vv. 355 & 368.

time even after attaining liberation. For *Advaita-Vedanta*, *moksha* does not mean the cessation of the physical body, but the extinction of ignorance and gaining the true knowledge. This aspect of liberation is significant because it provides promises and opportunities for every individual self to contribute its moral and spiritual potentialities towards the total transformation of its individual, social and cosmic dimensions.

Basing on the preceding discussions on the Hindu concept of liberation - as it is expounded by Sankara's *Advaita-Vedanta* - I am inclined to acknowledge that Sankara's *Advaita-Vedanta* represents the philosophy which has a grand vision of unity that encompasses nature, humanity and God. The primordial intuition in the *Advaita-Vedanta* is the basic unity of the entire reality. The universe (nature and humanity) and divine form one single continuum - One Reality - or to be more precise, belong to a relative order of things. It has an appeal, in general, to those who are committed to the unity of all for the transformation of the world in its moral and spiritual, religio-cultural, economics and ecological dimensions, and in particular to the pluralistic life of India enabling to hold together diversities in language, culture, ethnic groups, religious traditions and political ideologies. Because, for *Advaita-Vedanta*, the ultimate destiny of humanity is not limited to the liberation of an individual self but for the universal redemption.

After Sankara, Ramanuja ranks first among the greatest exponents of the *Vedanta*. He was a great leader and philosopher of the Hindu *Bhakti*

movement, who lived during the first-half of the eleventh century (A.D.) and early part of the twelfth century. In religious circle, the sect to which he belonged is known as *Vaishnavism*, however in philosophical circle, his tradition is called *Visistadvaita*, the qualified Non-Dualism. The *Visistadvaita* tradition was not originated by Ramanuja. This system is said to have been expounded by Bodhayana in his *Vritti*, written about 400 (B.C.). Later on, this system was further developed by the three great *Vaisnava Acharyas*, namely *Nathamunicharya*, *Yamunacharya* and *Ramanujacharya*. *Nathamunicharya*, living in the ninth century (A.D.), developed this system further on the basis of the devotional hymns of the *Alvars* and the scriptures known as *Pancaratra Agamas* of South India. *Yamunacharya*, the grandson of *Nathamunicharya*, had consolidated almost all the important *Vaisnava* doctrines; and upon this foundation, *Ramanujacharya* had built and systematized the *Visistadvaita* tradition of the *Vedanta* school.¹³ Today, Ramanuja is acknowledged by all as the greatest exponent of the *Visistadvaita* tradition of the *Vedanta* school of Hindu Philosophy. Ramanuja had nine literatures to his credit: the commentaries on *Bhagavadgita* and *Bramasutra* (known as *Sribhashya*), and seven religio-philosophical treatises, namely *Vedharta-Sangraha*, *Vedanta-Dipa*, *Vedanta-Sara*, *Saranagati-Gadya*, *Vaikuntha-Gadya*,

¹³ Sri Swami Sivananda, *All About Hinduism*, pp. 286-287; Maheswar Neog (ed.) *The Religion of Love and Devotion by Lakshminath Bezbaroa* (Jorhat: Assam Sahitya Sabha, 1968), pp. 2-5.

Sriranga-Gadya and *Nityagratha*. These literatures have become the main sources of the *Visistadvaita* tradition.¹⁴

In his *Vedartha-Sangraha*, one of his religio-philosophical treatises, Ramanuja states that the *Upanisads*, which lay down the good of the whole world, enshrine three fundamental teachings: (1) A seeker must acquire a true knowledge of the individual self and the Supreme; (2) he must devote himself to meditation, worship and adoration of the Supreme; (3) this realization leads him to the attainment of the Supreme. In brief, the first affirms the nature of Reality, the second declares the means, and the third states the goal of human struggles for liberation.¹⁵

Ramanuja, holding the *Vedantic* view, affirmed that the Ultimate Reality is only one - *Brahman*, and its attainment constitutes the supreme goal, the *moksha* (liberation) for the finite individuals. However, while Sankara's vision of the Ultimate Reality is the oneness based on the absolute identity between *Brahman* (Universal Self) and *Atman* (Individual Self), Ramanuja's vision of the Ultimate Reality is the oneness based on the relationship between the universal Self and the Individual Self. Ramanuja also affirmed the view that at the root of all human misery and chaos in the world is the ignorance (*avidya*) of and the estrangement from the Ultimate Reality - *Brahman*.

While he was attempting to systematize the philosophy of *Upanisads* concerning the relation between *Brahman*, the individual self and the

¹⁴ Sri Swami Sivananda, *All About Hinduism*, p. 286; S.S. Raghavachar (trans.), *Vedantha-Sangraha* of Sri Ramanuja (Mysore: Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, 1978), p.i.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.2.

world, Ramanuja had taken the stance of the ancient theistic Hindu orthodoxy. *Brahman*, the Ultimate Reality, is determinate and can therefore be defined by a statement of his essential attributes. In the words of *Upanisads*, "*Brahman* is real (*satyam*), conscious (*jnanam*) and infinite (*anantam*).¹⁶ Sankara did not consider these as attributes of *Brahman*, but Ramanuja accepted them as essential. Ramanuja's *Visistadvaita* is therefore described as qualified non-dualism. In this scheme of philosophy, the reality of both *Brahman* and the universe, as his attributes or modes, is recognized. The universe of sentient (*cit*) and non-sentient (*acit*) is no deception or illusion but genuine and real. The existence of the universe as well as the evil and chaos in it are real. *Brahman* is the basis of all existence. He is both the first cause and the final cause of the universe of sentient and non-sentient. *Brahman* is the material as well as the efficient cause of the universe -"From him the universe has emerged, in him it exists, and unto him it returns".¹⁷ *Brahman*, as the source and support of the universe, transforms himself into the cosmic manifold; and he is the Indwelling Self in his Creation, the ruler and controller of the cosmic process. It is to be, however, noted that, for Ramanuja's *Visistadvaita*, though *Brahman* transforms himself into the universe of sentient and non-sentient forms, remains distinct from them.

Further, the oneness based on relationship between *Brahman* and the universe is conceived by Ramanuja's *Visistadvaita* as how soul and

¹⁶ *Taittiriya Upanisad*, II, i. 3.

¹⁷ *Taittiriya Upanisad*, III.1.

body are related. A man has a soul and a body, and the soul, though distinct from the body, controls and guides it, lives in it, and uses it as an instrument, similarly *Brahman* is the soul of the universe, the source and sustenance of all beings and things, and the ruler over all. This soul-body relation between *Brahman* and the universe is defined by Ramanuja "thus: *adhara* and *adheya* -support and the supported; *niyamaha* and *niyamyā* - controller and the controlled; *sesin* and *sesa* -the Lord and his servant".¹⁸

The relation of support and the thing supported is from the point of view of metaphysics which defines *Brahman* as real, conscious and infinite. This relation emphasizes the inner unity within the Ultimate Reality, affirming the absolute dependence of the universe on God (*Brahman*) even as the body is absolutely dependent on the soul. The relation of controller and the controlled brings out the transcendental goodness, creativity and liberative impulse. The relation of the Lord and his servant satisfies the highest demands of ethics and aesthetics; by defining *Brahman* as the Supreme Lord and the universe of sentient and non-sentient as his servant, it is indicative that the whole cosmic process should exist and move according to his will and purpose. Therefore, according to Ramanuja's *Visistadvaita*, the Ultimate Reality is the oneness based on relationship between *Brahman* and the universe; they are unchangeably different but eternally related, as soul and body.¹⁹

¹⁸ S.S. Raghavachar (trans.), *Vedartha-Sangraha of Ramanuja*, p. 76.

¹⁹ Ibid.; S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 18.

Now for the question, if *Brahman* is the basis of all existence and absolutely good, why there are misery, bondage and chaos in the universe, Ramanuja's answer for this is that all happens because of *karma* (good or evil deeds) of individuals. But, the individuals cannot be liberated fully by their own *karmas* alone; God's grace is the ultimate factor of man's final emancipation. Ramanuja writes, "The Supreme Being (*Brahman*) endows all sentient beings (individual selves) with the power of action. Thus the general equipment needed for the performance as well as non-performance of actions is furnished by him... The individual, thus equipped with all the requisite powers and facilities, endowed with the power of initiative, engages in actions and abstinence from action by his own spontaneity of will."²⁰ From this statement it is clear that man's choice of good or evil is an exercise of his free will that makes him responsible for his actions, while God remains unaffected by them.

According to Ramanuja's *Visistadvaita*, there are three classes of individual souls, namely, *Baddha* (bound), *Mukta* (free) and *Nitya* (eternal). The bound souls are caught up in the meshes of *samsara* (cycle of births and deaths) and are striving to be released; they wander from one life to another till they are liberated. The freed souls were once subject to *samsara*, but have attained the final liberation. The eternal souls have never been in bondage. They are eternally free; they live with God in a place called *Vaikuntha*.²¹ The individual soul, while exercising his free will,

²⁰ S.S. Raghavachar (trans.), *Vedartha-Sangraha of Ramanuja*, p. 96.

²¹ Swami Sivananda, *All About Hinduism*, p. 290.

tends to forget his divine origin and destiny, the true mode of *Brahman*, by the influence of *avidya* (ignorance); develops in himself an ego and identifies himself with matter, until he is bound to undergo through many births and deaths, experiencing many kinds of human suffering. In other words, the individual self which is the eternal mode of God, under the influence of *avidya*, tends to identify itself with matter, degenerates itself into many forms, and becomes subject to the evils of *samsara*, or empirical existence, until it is redeemed or emancipated by God himself.²²

Now, in regards to the way of attaining *moksha* (liberation), Ramanuja had preference more on *bhakti* (devotion). Taking the stance on the orthodoxy of the ancient Hindu theism, he affirmed *Brahman* as a personal God and had inclined more on *bhakti* as the way towards attaining the supreme goal (*moksha*). Ramanuja's inclination towards the way of devotion, however, is not in its exclusiveness but only in emphasis and in relation to the other two *margas* (ways): *karma marga* (way of action) and *jnana marga* (way of knowledge). It is also to be noted that Ramanuja did not conceive *bhakti* in the popular sense of term, that is, in the sense of emotional worship to a personal God, but in the sense of intent meditation upon and loving-service or devotion to *Brahman*, the Ultimate Reality. Ramanuja never denied which *Upanisads* repeatedly proclaim that human emancipation is to be attained by knowledge. However, he held the view that the knowledge in question is not merely a case of intellectual judgment putting an end to error and uncertainty, but deliberate and willed process

²² S.S. Raghavachar (trans.), *Vedārtha-Sangraha of Ramanuja*, p 95-97.

of contemplation or meditation. Ramanuja also held the view that in the process of intent meditation, there develop, in the life of the individual seeker, the qualities like the control of the mind, the control of senses, austerity, purity, forgiveness, straightforwardness, discrimination as to what is to be feared and not feared, mercy and non-violence, in an ever-increasing manner.²³ Interestingly, Ramanuja had further clarified that this intent meditation should take on the character of love for *Brahman*, on the part of the seeker. When the seeker chooses *Brahman* and contemplate on him through the sacrificial and absolute self-surrender, *Brahman* also, in his grace, chooses that seeker and reveals his supreme Reality. He writes, "The supreme Person, who is overflowing with compassion, being pleased with such love, showers his grace on the aspirant, which destroy all his inner darkness".²⁴

Therefore, one may draw a conclusion that according to Ramanuja's *Visistadvaita* the *Bhakti Marga* (way of devotion) is founded on the grace of God; above all, it emphasizes the aspect of election and grace from the side of God. Ramanuja emphasized that the central motive of God in descending to earth in human form is his love for humanity in particular and the universe as a whole, and his desire to liberate it.²⁵ In this perception of *bhakti*, self-effort and divine grace are not opposed to each other. The culmination of spiritual experience through the intent meditation - sacrificial service and absolute self-surrender - is realizing God's

²³ Ibid., pp 97-98.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Swami Prabhavananda, *Spiritual Heritage of India*, p. 310.

unbounded love and attainment of the Supreme, the Ultimate Reality.²⁶ This is the spiritual realization on the part of the individual self, the complete transformation in relation to the Ultimate Reality, through the practice of *bhakti*, in which divine election and grace play the ultimate roles.

The attainment of the Supreme, or to be liberated, according to Ramanuja's *Visistadvaita*, does not mean neither the dissolution of the individual self nor its complete identification with *Brahman*, the Universal Self, but rather a union of one's will with the will of God. For Ramanuja, living in the service of God, in love and devotion, is the supreme ideal. The state of liberation, therefore, is unity between the devotee and God *Brahman*, not by way of merger or identification, but communion. The individual seeker experiences the love-union with *Brahman*, without losing one's individuality but rather developing it to its fullest form. As the true vision of one's self and of the Universal Self is not possible through ordinary means of perception, it is possible only through *bhakti*, which is a unique form of knowledge - the realization and transformation through loving devotion and sacrificial service to God.

Ramanuja's *Visistadvaita* does not, however, believe in *jivanmukti*, or liberation during one's life time, but rather in *videhamukti*, or liberation after one's physical death. For it holds the view that the liberation (*moksha*) is not in embodiment but complete release from embodiment; that there is still possibility, for a man while he is still in his embodied state, of being influenced by *avidya* (ignorance) and hence being under the bondage of

²⁶ Ibid., p. 312.

karma-samsara, or the cycle of births and deaths, as the effect of the evil actions of one's past life. It emphasizes that it is only when one is able to pass beyond *karma-samsara*, one can attain *moksha* (liberation). According to Ramanuja's *Visistadvaita*, *moksha* means the soul's passing from the troubles of mundane life into a kind of heaven or paradise (*Vaikuntha*) where it will experience immortality and eternal bliss in the presence of God. Therefore, the physical death is not something negative, rather it is understood as the soul's passing 'through the path of light' into its original and eternal home, where it will serve God for ever with love and devotion. It is believed that the liberated soul attains to the nature of the Supreme, but never becomes identical with Him - *Brahman*. It never loses its individuality, and this is the reason how it could enjoy the bliss in worshipping and serving God for ever.²⁷

The Hindu concept of liberation, as it is expounded by Ramanuja's *Visistadvaita*, represents the philosophy which affirms the reality and potentiality of every individual thing and being. Affirming the reality of the universe as well as the reality of the evil and the chaos in it, *Visistadvaita* recognizes the seriousness of the pain and suffering in the life of every individual as well as chaos happening in the cosmic order. It also recognizes the moral and spiritual struggles of every individual soul for its own liberation and its potential contribution towards the social and cosmic transformation. Further, by maintaining the relation between *Brahman* and the universe as how soul and body are related, at the same time by

²⁷ Ibid., p. 312; Sri Swami Sivananda, *All About Hinduism*, p. 291-292.

proclaiming divine grace as the ultimate factor for human liberation, *Visistadvaita* affirms God's active involvement in the process of individual as well as cosmic liberation.

Now, having analysed the Hindu concept of liberation, as it is expounded by the *Vedanta* school, the most propound and popular among the Hindu schools of philosophy, let us examine the views of the other schools also. However, without going into all the details of each school, only their representing views will be taken up here.

The *Nyaya* and *Vaiseshika* schools are very similar in their philosophical views. The *Nyaya* is said to be founded by Gautama in sixth century (B.C.) and Kanada is said to have composed the *Vaiseshika Sutra* earlier than the *Nyaya*. They try to give an analysis of the world of experience. They analyse all the things of the world into seven categories (*padarthas*). They explain how God has made all this material world out of atoms and molecules. They believe in the eternity of atoms of the four elements (*bhutas*), namely earth, water, fire and air. They also believe in the reality of time and space. They postulate a separate soul (*atma*) for every person. The *Vaiseshika* has specially developed the atomic theory of Creation, whereas the *Nyaya* is well-known for its theory of knowledge. Like other schools their final aim is liberation. According to them, misapprehension, wrong action, rebirth and suffering constitute bondage. Liberation is attained by true knowledge of the nature and functions of the

padarthas. When true knowledge is obtained rebirth ceases and the soul attains liberation.²⁸

The *Sankhya* school is atheistic, for it does not believe in any God. *Kapila Muni* is said to be the founder of this school. Nobody is able to give a definite date to its founder; some say it must be before the time of Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. It is dualistic, for it postulates two ultimate realities : *Prakriti* (matter) and *Purusha* (spirit). Both *Prakriti* and *Purusha* are *Anadi* (beginningless) and are independent from each other. It has profounded its own theory of evolution and involution of the universe. It denies that anything can be produced out of nothing. The universe and the things and beings there in are evolved when the equilibrium in *Prakriti* is disturbed. It maintains that the identification of *Purusha* with *Prakriti* due to non-discrimination is bondage; the failure to discriminate between *Purusha* and *Prakriti* is the cause of *karma-samsara* and pain, which constitute bondage. *Sankhya* school declares that the aim of its system of philosophy is to eradicate the three kinds of pain, namely *adhyatmika* or internal (physical or mental pain caused by diseases), *adhibhautika* or external (pain caused by rebirth, other fellow human beings or animals) and *adhidaivika* or celestial (pain caused by thunder, cold, heat, rain, etc.). When one is able to discriminate between *Purusha*

²⁸ Swami Prabhavananda, *Spiritual Heritage of India*, pp. 202-207.

and *Prakriti* there happens emancipation in one's life; again when equilibrium takes place in *Prakriti*, cosmic liberation can be experienced.²⁹

The *Yoga* school, in its metaphysical aspects, is very similar to the *Sankhya* school, with one important difference its affirmation of God's existence. It is therefore called a theistic or *Seswar Sankhya*. Traditionally, *Yoga* school is said to have been systematized by *Patanjali*, about whose date and identity there are many opinions.³⁰ It deals with the control of the thought-waves (*Vrittis*) and with meditation. It systematizes the ways to discipline the mind and the senses. As a system of practical discipline, it has a wide influence in India. According to *Patanjali*, every individual self or *Purusha* is pure, free and divine; suffering, sin, limitations and all imperfections are due to *avidya* (ignorance), which veils the true nature of the Self, causing men to identify themselves with the non-self or *Prakriti*. The causes of man's suffering and bondage are ignorance, egoism, attachment, aversion, and the desire to cling to mundane life. Through the disciplined practice of *Yoga* systems of mind and body - senses man can obtain the discriminative knowledge, which leads him to self-realization and final emancipation. The absolute release, or liberation, from the bondage can also be attained by devotion to God through the spiritual *Yoga* disciplines. The *Yoga* school also believes in *jivanmukti* or continuing life even after attainment of liberation.³¹

²⁹ Swami Sivananda, *All About Hinduism*, pp. 236-254; Sakuntala Rao Shastri, *Aspiration from the Fresh World*, p. 181.

³⁰ Sakuntala Rao Shastri, *Aspiration from the Fresh World*, p. 181.

³¹ Swami Prabhavananda, *Spiritual Heritage of India*, pp. 226-264.

The *Purva Mimamsa* school is also known as *Karma Mimamsa* because it lays most stress upon *Karma Marga* (way of action or service), which chiefly denotes the performance of *Vedic* ceremonial rites. Jaimini, the compiler of the *Mimamsa Sutrās*, is said to be the founder of this Hindu school of philosophy, though there are some controversies in regards to his identity and date. The two main objectives of *Purva Mimamsa* school are, in the first place, to establish the authority of the *Vedas*, and, secondly, to explain their true meaning. It declares that *Vedas* are eternal, self-revealed, without human or divine authorship and hence the only source of knowledge and authority for Hindu *Dharma*.³² It gives very high authority and importance to the *Vedas* that it has too little place for God. True religious life, therefore, is the observance of *Dharma*, or religious duties and ceremonial rites which lead to heaven in the life hereafter; and it lays a stress that the *Vedas* alone are the authoritative guide concerning the sacred rites and ethics. It holds the view that all human suffering, rebirth or bondage are because of the performance of *Nishidda Karmas*, or prohibited actions. Selfless action and proper performance of *Vedic* rites lead to the annihilation of bondage and cessation of the cycle of births and deaths. Liberation, according to Jaimini, is after death in heaven; it is not a state of bliss; in it the self achieves its real nature beyond pleasure and pain. However, some *Mimamsa* philosophers have accepted the *Vedānta* view of liberation as bliss.³³

³² Ibid., pp. 265-267.

³³ Ibid.

In this brief analysis of the liberation concept expounded by the six classical schools of Hindu Philosophy, no doubt, looking at the views in details, we find some differences, however, common features are also indicative in all the schools. Human suffering, cycle of birth and death, and disharmony in the cosmic order are generally considered as bondage in Hindu Philosophy. The ignorance, lack of true knowledge, egoism and wrong action constitute the causes of bondage. Realization of unity in God-human-world complex lead to the attainment of liberation.

2. Liberation in Buddhism

Why Hinduism could not spread in along with Buddhism?

Buddhism began in India during fifth century (B.C.). Siddhartha Gautama (563-483 B.C.) was the founder of this religion. Buddhism did not start as a new and independent religion. It was an offshoot of Hinduism. Its founder, Gautama was born, grew up and died a Hindu. His main object was to bring about a reformation in the religious faith and practices within Hinduism. S.S. Radhakrishnan maintained that Gautama's teaching was only a restatement of the thought of *Upanisads* with a new vision and emphasis.³⁴ He belonged to a royal family, but at the age of twenty-nine he renounced a legitimate claim to political power. Leaving his young wife and a child behind, Gautama became a mendicant, wandering from place to place in search of truth. He spent sometime experimenting with Hindu *Brahmanism* but became totally disillusioned with its ritualism and sacrifices. Soon afterwards, he engaged in a period of intense meditation and received the long-awaited enlightenment that afforded him the title

³⁴ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Religions*, p. 163.

Buddha. The remainder of his life was spent in travel, teaching and preaching the religious vision, or better, the philosophy of life that gain him multitude of followers in the centuries ahead.³⁵

Gautama himself wrote nothing, and none of his spiritual or philosophical teachings was written down for more than three hundred years after his death. It was only 245 (B.C.) a council of five hundred monks of Gautama Buddha gathered together the oral traditions of his teachings over three hundred years and assembled them into written form in Pali language, which have become the original sources for all Buddhist teachings. This canon of Gautama Buddha's teachings is called *Tripitaka* (Three Baskets). It has three parts: (1) *Vinaya-Pitaka* or the Basket of Rules of Discipline; (2) *Sutta-Pitaka* or the Basket of Sermons; and (3) *Abidhamma Pitaka* or the Basket of metaphysics, psychology and philosophy. About a hundred years later the second council was held and since then arose two main divisions among the Buddhists : *Theravada* (also known as *Sthavira* or *Hinayana*), the more orthodox group; and *Mahayana* (also known as *Mahasanghika*), the unorthodox and progressive group. Christmas Humphreys states that the main doctrinal difference between the two schools is the attainment of the supreme goal of life - the Enlightenment and Peace. The *Theravada* school maintains that the attainment of *Nirvana* is the fruit of strict observance of the Rules, the way which is more of the monastic life and discipline. However, the *Mahayana* school stresses a mystical and devotional turn to this doctrine. Thus it

³⁵ Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Book Ltd., 1962), pp. 25-33.

proclaims that higher than *Arhathood*, or personal sanctity through the strict observance of the monastic disciplines, is *Buddhahood*, or the state of supreme enlightenment and peace, which Gautama had attained, and that is the state which is accessible to all. Instead of asceticism and monastic seclusion of the *Theravada*, it visualizes the attainment of enlightenment and peace in the midst of the tumult of the world; and instead of the unaided efforts through the spiritual disciplines of the *Theravada*, it urges dependence on and worship of Buddha as an incarnation of God, the Universal Buddha.³⁶

All forms, of Buddhism, however, as it has been pointed by S. Radhakrishnan, agree that Gautama Buddha was the founder of Buddhism, that he strove and attained *Nirvana*, that the world is full of suffering, that the suffering has a cause, and that there is a way to attain complete freedom from suffering, or to attain *Nirvana*.³⁷

Like many other world religions, the goal of Buddhism is also liberation, or *Nirvana* (in Pali, *Nibbana*). However, the Buddhists themselves acknowledge that *Nirvana* cannot be explained in all its finality, it can only be experienced. In this regards, S.Radhakrishnan writes about Gautama Buddha, "He felt that his mission was not so much to unveil the secrets of blessedness as to win men to its realization".³⁸ Gautama aimed at a spiritual experience in which all selfish craving is extinct and with it every fear and passion. It is a state of perfect inward peace, accompanied

³⁶ Ibid., 45-58.

³⁷ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Religions*, p. 162.

³⁸ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, I (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1923), p. 447.

by the conviction of having attained spiritual freedom, a state words cannot describe. Only he who has experienced it knows what it is. He said, " But I deem the highest goal of a man to be the stage in which there is neither old age, nor fear, nor disease, nor birth, nor death, nor anxieties and in which there is no continuous renewal of activity".³⁹

In our attempt to analyse the Buddhist concept of liberation, its doctrine of *Tilakkhana*, Three Signs of all Existence, seems inevitable to be examined here. Gautama Buddha, while diagnosing human predicament, discovered the following three signs or characteristics of all existence in the order of space and time: *anicca* (sign of flux or constant change), *anatta* (sign of non-Self or absence of permanent soul) and *dukkha* (sign of suffering). In the first place, Gautama Buddha saw the universe of mind and matter, in the order of space and time, in a state of constant change or flux (*anicca*). Nothing in the universe is permanent. No thing or being is the same at this moment as it was one moment ago. Even the hills, rivers, oceans and skies are in the ceaseless becoming or never-ending change. All the parts of human body, even man-made objects, ideas and institutions are in a state of constant flux. The sign of flux (*anicca*) in the universe also bears in itself the principle of cause and effect. It is the process of discontinuous continuity, because when an entity is annihilated, another arises out of it. It denies the notion of complete annihilationism, and, at the same time, disapproves externalism or permanent.⁴⁰

³⁹ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Religions*, p. 164.

⁴⁰ Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism*, pp. 85-89.

Some people consider this view of Gautama Buddha as pessimistic. But this is not true. The Buddha did not accept a fatalistic view.⁴¹ The flux or constant change has both positive, or progressive, and negative, or decaying, potentialities. The Buddha did not say that man has no control over his present and future. One's aim should be to conquer time, overcome the cycle of constant birth, decay and death by following the right path. He said, "Verily, I say unto you now, O monks: All things are perishable; work out your deliverance with earnestness".⁴² Though man is bound, as any other thing or being in the world, to the wheel of flux, to the cycle of constant birth and death, to the experience of pleasures and pains, there is always possibility, under the positive or progressive potentiality of flux, to break the chains of ever continuing process of change, or to attain the state of perfect freedom and peace - *Nirvana*. There is always constant change happening in the body, mind and behaviour of every individual man. The Buddha advised the people to follow the Noble Eightfold Path, which would lead them to know the truth and do the right effort, which in turn would bring a total and positive transformation in their individual, social and cosmic spheres of life.⁴³

In the second place, Gautama Buddha could visualize the universe in a state of non-Self or absence of permanent soul (*anatta*). The impermanence and soullessness, which are inter-related, are the cornerstones of all Buddhist thoughts. According to Gautama Buddha, in this

⁴¹ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Religions*, pp. 165-166.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁴³ Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism*, pp. 80-81.

phenomenal world of mind and matter, which is in the state of flux, one individual entity is not identical with another entity, and that particular entity never remain the same in different consecutive moments, and it does not have in itself any unchangeable self, or permanent soul. A human being, having his constituents, namely material elements, mental state consisting of feeling, perception, impression and knowledge derived through the sense-organs, is also changing every moment, and even the so called human soul is not permanent and unchangeable.⁴⁴

It is because of this doctrine Gautama Buddha has been charged as an atheist who denied the existence of God and also reality of soul (self). Christmas Humphreys writes, "As between the theist and atheist positions, Buddhism is atheist, but it would be more correct to say that it analyses the complex of conflicting ideas comprised in the term God with the Same dispassionate care as it analyses the so-called soul".⁴⁵ The theistic view of God, or believing in a personal God, does not fit well with the Buddhist thoughts, particularly with the original vision of Gautama Buddha. His teaching on God, in the sense of an Ultimate Reality, is neither agnostic, as is sometimes claimed, nor vague, but clear and logical.⁴⁶ He expressed himself very clearly in this regard when he said:

There is an unborn, and an unoriginated, an unmade, an uncompounded; were there not, O mendicants, there would be no escape from the world of the born, the originated, the made, and the compounded.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 85-89.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 79.,

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ *Udana*, VIII, 3, cited by Swami Prabhavananda, *Spiritual Heritage of India*, p. 181.

In this statement, it is indicative that the Buddha had a vision of the One, that which is the Causeless Cause, the Unmoved Mover, or Absolute, in philosophical terms, behind every thing or being which exists or moves. That which also may be called the Ultimate Reality or Universal Self (Soul), with the idea and terms coming from the *Vedantic* school of Hindu Philosophy. However, the Buddha had refused to define the nature of this One, the unchangeable and uncompounded reality, and he emphatically declared it to be beyond human comprehension and expressions. The Buddha 'maintained a noble silence' on this subject. He simply stated the fact that within the range of our normal experience there exist only compound and changeable objects - objects pertaining therefore only to the non-Self. To him, the mind and the ego are as clearly non-Self as is the body. But this should not amount to the denial of the Self (Soul), or the reality of the One, behind the changeable universe, but itself being permanent, unborn and infinite. Because the Buddha is reported also as saying "Self is the Lord of self and the goal of self. What other Lord can there be ?".⁴⁸ He is also reported to have said as "I have taken refuge in the Self"⁴⁹, and similarly he is reported to have advised other as "make the Self your refuge and your lamp".⁵⁰ Looking at these expressions of the Buddha, one may safely draw a conclusion that he did not deny the reality of both the Universal Self and the individual self. However, he did not admit the

⁴⁸ *Dahammapada*, v.379 f., cited by Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism*, p. 88.

⁴⁹ *Digh Nikaya*, ii,120, cited by Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism*, p. 88.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, ii, 100, cited by Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism*, p.88.

identity of the individual self with the Universal Self, as in the case of *Vedantic* view; and he did not admit also the individual self as permanent and unchangeable. In this doctrine of *Anatta* (non-Self), we clearly see Buddhist motive for the cosmic as well as the individual dimensions of liberation (*Nirvana*). It expresses the reality of the existence of the Self - the Universal Self, without which there would be no possibility for the things or beings, mind or matter, in this universe, to be liberated, or to attain the state of complete freedom from the bondage of flux and separate identities.⁵¹

In this light, later, the *Mahayana* school of Buddhism has developed the *Bodhisattva* and Pure Land doctrines. While explicating the nature of *Nirvana*, the *Therevada* school is not willing to go beyond *Arhathood*, or the extinction of the suffering and the flux in one's individual or personal life, through one's personal efforts, the Mahayana school, the unorthodox and progressive one of the two main schools of Buddhism, has gone to that extent that it almost becomes theistic in its spirituality. The doctrine of *Bodhisattva* (*bodhi* = wisdom or enlightenment; *sattva* = state of being) expresses the view that a man can be liberated, or attain Enlightenment, or *Buddhahood* (*Nirvana*), or becomes *Bodhisattva*, while he is still alive. According to this doctrine of *Mahayana* school, the role of grace and compassion on the part of the Universal Self, is more prominent than human effort, in the attainment of liberation (*Nirvana*). It is believed that when a person who has attained the enlightenment is willing to do self-

⁵¹ Swami Prabhavananda, *Spiritual Heritage of India*, pp. 181-182.

sacrifice of his entering into the Pure Land, or a state or place of Paradise, for the service of others, for a period of time, that is, he is still willing to undergo even sufferings in helping others, to attain the same goal, then the Universal Wisdom (*Buddha*) incarnates in his image. The Universal Wisdom (Self) incarnates in that person's personality, with love and compassion, and becomes *Bodhisattva*, who sacrifices himself for the liberation of the world, in general, and individual human beings, in particular.⁵²

All the forms of Buddhism agree that Siddhartha Gautama had attained *Nirvana* and had continued to live for the service of the world, preaching and teaching to the people about the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path and the Enlightenment, until, at last, he reached the climax of *Nirvana*, which is known as *Parinirvana*, or the state of complete rest and peace. The *Mahayana* school stresses that any person, who is awakened or enlightened can become *Bodhisattva*. It claims that in the history, after Gautama Buddha there have been some prominent Buddhists who have become *Bodhisattvas*.⁵³

The third sign that the Buddha saw in this universe is the omnipresence of suffering (*dukkha*). The same is explicitly expressed in his famous teaching of Four Noble Truths -(1) that *dukkha* (suffering) is a universal fact; (2) that there is cause of suffering; (3) that suffering can be overcome; and (4) that there is a way to overcome suffering. The Pali word used for suffering by Gautama Buddha is very rich in meaning. He said:

⁵² Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism*, pp. 158-165.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

"Birth is suffering, decay is suffering, disease is suffering, death is suffering, association with the unpleasing is suffering, separation from the pleasing is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering".⁵⁴ 'Suffering' is only one translation of the Pali word *dukkha*, which covers all that we understand by pain, illness, disease (physical and mental), including discomfort and disharmony in society and in the cosmic order.⁵⁵

Recognizing the reality of suffering in the world, Gautama had agreed with many founders of world religions that the goal of a religion is not only to inspire and help the people to attain the highest good, but also to remove the human suffering from the world, or to liberate people from the bondage of suffering of many kinds. Gautama Buddha, while recognizing the reality of suffering in the world, also discovered that there is a cause of suffering. The second Noble Truth speaks this fact. At the beginning stage of his ministry, just after his attainment of *Buddhahood*, Gautama, in his first sermon, proclaimed the cause of suffering to be desire, or craving (Pali: *tanha*). He said, "Verily, it is this thirst or craving, causing the renewal of existence, accompanied by sensual delight, seeking satisfaction now here, now there - the craving for the gratification of the passions, for continued existence in the world of sense".⁵⁶ It is the never-ending craving for the self-satisfaction and pleasures which, though they give some satisfaction for a moment, only arouse more desire, which in

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 81-82.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ F. Max Muller (ed), *The Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. xi (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), pp. 148-150.

turn creates more sufferings. Christmas Humphreys maintains that the Pali word *tanha* (desire) has both positive as well as negative connotations - 'desire appears in many forms, ranging from ungovernable lust to the purest yearning for the helping of mankind'.⁵⁷ There are desires for the continuing life here on earth, but may be for the service of others, for the sacrificial service of helping others for liberation. The desire in itself is not evil. The desire for extending one's own existence is not discouraged, rather the desire for continuing one's life for the good cause, serving others for extending the liberation, is encouraged. The Buddhists claim that their religion is not pessimistic or negative towards life, but it is life affirming. The desire to be overcome or removed is the desire of impermanent, changeable and perishable self and which generates suffering. When one has attained *Nirvana*, the selfish desire itself will be extinguished completely, but the life itself should continue.

In the third and the fourth Noble Truths, Gautama Buddha proclaimed that the suffering can be overcome and that there is a way to overcome it. If the first two Noble Truths seem pessimistic, the remaining two usher hope to those who are under bondage, for Buddhism proclaims the cessation of suffering by the elimination of its cause, desire, and this can be achieved by treading of the Noble Eightfold Path. Gautama Buddha asserted not a mere philosophy of suffering, but a philosophy that would enable one to get release from the grip of suffering. As long as one is still in the state of flux, he is under the chains of egoistic desire and

⁵⁷ Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism*, p. 91.

consequent sufferings. Therefore, the literal meaning of *Nirvana* is 'dying out', 'waning out' or 'extinction', as of a fire. Using this simile, the world is described as under the flames, kindled by a fire of desire. The Buddhist Philosophy also, as in the case of Hindu Philosophy, accepts the law of karma and rebirth. The cycle of birth and rebirth is the rekindling of fire from one flame to another flame, and this keeps the fire of birth, pain, despair, anxiety, old age, decay, death, etc., constantly burning. *Nirvana* is described as extinguishing of this flame, the flame of desire. This should not be understood as the annihilation of the self, as the end of life itself, as it has been the case sometimes, but it is the extinction of the non-self which is being under the wheel of flux, the egoistic desire, greed, and all forms of suffering; therefore it is the end of rebirth. It is the extinction of separateness in the universe of sentient and non-sentient entities, as an effect of the constant flux. Although *Nirvana* is described mostly in negative terms, occasionally it has been expressed in positive terms also. The state of *Nirvana*, is expressed, in positive terms, as enlightenment, perfect peace, bliss, complete calm and rest. But the Buddhists acknowledge the human limitation in such as these descriptions of *Nirvana*. Therefore, these expressions of *Nirvana* are not exhaustive.⁵⁸

The fourth Noble Truth declares the way that leads to overcoming the suffering, or attainment of *Nirvana*. It is known as the Noble Eightfold Path, which is also referred to as Middle Path, because it claims to avoid two extreme of indulging in highly speculative arguments, on the one hand,

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 127.

and indulging in meaningless ritualism and sacrifices, on the other. The Eightfold Path consists of (1) Right View (2) Right Determination (3) Right Speech (4) Right Conduct (5) Right Livelihood (6) Right Effort (7) Right Mindfulness and (8) Right Concentration. This Eightfold Path, which was proclaimed by Gautama Buddha, after he himself had attained *Nirvana*, is accepted by all forms of Buddhism as the essential manual to be followed by every Buddhist, aiming to overcome suffering and its cause, desire, or to attain *Nirvana*. The word 'Right' is equivalent to the Latin *summum*, or 'highest', the quality in its most perfect form.⁵⁹ Therefore, the moral and spiritual standard, which is also the self-effort of every individual, required to overcome the suffering, is very high. According to the Buddha's teaching, man must work out his own liberation, by his own efforts; no one can do for him what he must do for himself. This emphasis on self-struggle, self-conquest, or self-emancipation, is fundamental in the Buddha's teaching. But this must not be interpreted as egoistic, self-centred, or individualistic concept of liberation. Rather, if one analyses properly and with open mind, its individual, social and cosmic dimensions will be discovered.

The eight steps of this Middle Path are to be taken together, for they are interrelated; they should not be taken one after another. The first two steps - Right View and Right Determination - are known as *Prajna* (Wisdom). In the right perspective of Gautama Buddha's teaching of the Three Signs of All Existence *anicca* (sign of flux), *anatta* (sign of non-Self)

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 110.

and *dukkha* (sign of suffering), and Four Noble Truths, one should have a right knowledge of his own self, that is, the non-Self, in relation to the Self. One should have right view of the reality of flux and suffering in the universe. The ignorance, or wrong knowledge, of which generates more suffering and hence deepen one's own bondage; but the fruit of the right knowledge is leading towards the enlightenment and perfect peace - *Nirvana*. The right determination or aspiration arises from the right view. One's determination and striving should not be selfish but for the total transformation or liberation of all mankind and cosmic order, of which he is only a part. The Buddha's own aspiration was not merely to attain *Nirvana* for himself, but to bring about the state of *Nirvana* to the world.⁶⁰

From the third to the sixth steps, the Eightfold Path is known as *Sila* (Morality). According to the teaching of the Buddha, the perfection of knowledge, too, is not possible without morality. In Buddhism, the morality is expressed in these virtues of right speech, conduct, livelihood and effort. While these virtues are in practice in right perspective of morality, in concrete terms, the Buddhists do not admit gender discrimination, caste or class distinction, killing of living beings and stress non-violence (*ahimsa*). The proper selection of occupation and taking up the right way for one's striving are also stressed.⁶¹

The last two steps - Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration - are known as *Samadhi* (Contemplation). Like the *Yoga* school of Hindu

⁶⁰ Swami Prabhavananda, *Spiritual Heritage of India*, pp. 189-190; Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism*, p. 110.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 110-115.

Philosophy, Gautama Buddha also emphasized the practice of the mind-control. Right mindfulness is focusing one's thought on good virtues and avoiding the thinking on evil and selfish desires; and right concentration is keeping one's mind in calm state, raising it above joy and suffering. When one's control of the mind reaches to the state of equilibrium the suffering and its cause, desire, will be eliminated, and he will attain the supreme enlightenment and perfect peace - *Nirvana*.⁶²

Looking at this brief survey of the Buddhist concept of liberation, one may be able to assert that it represents the philosophy which affirms the universality of flux and suffering which constitute the bondage, and, identifying the cause of suffering as desire, which also proclaims that the bondage can be eliminated. Further, by declaring the Eightfold Path, the practical way of morality and spirituality, the Buddhist Philosophy, as a whole, and its concept of liberation (*Nirvana*), in particular, has a great promise for the individual, social and cosmic transformation. Through the complete destruction and extinction of the wheel of flux, egoistic craving and consequent suffering, one may experience the supreme enlightenment and perfect peace, and enter into the communion with the Universal Buddha, or attain *Buddhahood*. This is the state of liberation *Nirvana*, where there is no more craving, greed and individuality, and where suffering is extinguished.

In conclusion, it is important for us to recognize, in the context of philosophical analysis of liberation, a few fundamental concepts in

⁶² Ibid., pp. 116-117.

attainment of the ultimate goal such as the bondage, the undesirable state or condition, from which deliverance or freedom is sought for, the causes of bondage and suffering, the ways and means of deliverance, the state of complete freedom, and so on. For these concepts are met with both at the pre-logical level in myths, spiritual visions and religio-cultural practices and, also at the logical level, in conceptual schemas, like those reflected in the philosophies of Hinduism and Buddhism. Thus, what may have been conceptualized as the "bondage" at the latter may present itself as "chaos", "poverty", "drought", "disease", "injustice", "defeat", "oppression", "absence of peace", etc., at the former level. The close observation of the concepts like "healing", "release", "prosperity", "moral and spiritual cleansing", "peace", "justice", "harmony in God, world and human relationship", etc., may also pave the way for the fuller understanding of liberation in a sense of total transformation of individual, social and cosmic life of the concerned people. Thus there is a sense in which it may be said that a philosophy grows out of a mythological worldview, or a religio-cultural vision, even as philosophy itself is a mature reflection on the deeply felt truths of the mythological insights, or religio-cultural visions.
