

Chapter – 4

CHAPTER – 4

Liberation: From *Nāstika* Standpoints

In the previous chapter we have discussed the theories of liberation (*Mokṣa*) advocated by the major Indian thinkers who are called ‘*āstika*’. Let us now elaborate the views of the ‘*nāstika*’ schools. What do they understand by ‘*mukti*’ or ‘*mokṣa*’?

4.i. Liberation according to the Jainas

According to Jainism, there are seven categories, viz., *jīva*, *ajīva*, *āsrava*, *bandha*, *samvara*, *nirjara* and *mokṣa*. Some Jainas also admit two more categories - *pāpa* and *punya*. Thus for them there are nine categories and the former includes these two *āsravas*. It has been held by the Jainas that an aspirant of liberation ought to know these categories. It seems that the Jaina classification of categories is purely from the standpoint of a *mumukṣu* i.e. an aspirant of liberation. *Jīva* is similar to *puruṣa* of *sāṃkhya* and the *ātman* of *vaiśnava-vedānta*. Consciousness is the very essence of *jīva*. According to Jainism, the *jīvas* are infinite in number. It has been argued by them that if it were not so, a time would come when all the *jīvas* would attain liberation and the world would become empty; or, the already liberated *jīvas* would have to return to the earth, a view

quite unacceptable. So it is maintained that the *jīvas* are infinite in number. But *jīvas* are many only quantitatively; qualitatively they are all alike.

Karma is the link, which unites the soul with the body. Ignorance of the truth and four passions viz. anger (*krodha*), greed (*lobha*), pride (*māna*) and delusion (*māyā*) which are called *kasāya* or sticky substances where *kārmic* particles stick, attract the flow of *kārmic* matter towards the soul. The state when *kārmic* particles actually begin to flow towards the soul to bind it is called *āsrava* or flow. The state when these particles actually infiltrate into the soul and bind it is called *bandha* or bondage. The ideal bondage (*bhava-bandha*) of the soul takes place as soon as it has bad disposition and the material bondage (*dravya-bandha*) takes place when there is an actual influx of *karma* into the soul. In bondage, the *kārmic* matter unites with the soul by intimate interpenetration, just as water unites with milk or fire unites with the red-hot iron ball. It is for this reason that we find life and consciousness in every part of the body. By the possession and practice of right faith, knowledge and conduct, the influx of fresh *karma* is stopped. This state is called *samvara* or stoppage. Then already existing *karma* must be exhausted. This state is called *nirjara* or wearing out. When the last particle of *karma* has been exhausted 'the partnership between the soul and the matter is dissolved'.

and the soul shines in its intrinsic nature of infinite faith, knowledge, bliss and power. This state is called *mokṣa* or liberation.

Right faith, right knowledge and right conduct have come to be known in Jaina ethics as the three gems (*triratna*) that shine in a good life. In the very first *sūtra* of *tattvārthādhigama sūtra Umāsvāmī* states this cardinal teaching of Jainism; the path of liberation lies through right faith, knowledge and conduct. Liberation is the joint effect of these three.

Man's hope of liberation rests on the fact that the process of the influx of new *karma* can be stopped; and as a means to this end that the discipline, in its triple form, right knowledge, right faith and right conduct, is prescribed. As in the case of the forging of bondage, there are two steps to make the soul free from it. The first is the stoppage of the flow of new *karma*, and it is called *karma*-Check (*samvara*); the second is that of destroying the *karma* that has accumulated from the past, and it is described as the falling off of *karma* (*nirjara*). With the complete destruction of binding *karma*, one automatically attains liberation (*mokṣa*), which is a state of absolute perfection and implies, by the way, that although Jainism may deny the existence of a supreme God, it retains the idea of the divine as representing perfection. These five, viz. movement of *karma* (*āsrava*), bondage (*bandha*), *karma*-check (*samvara*)

its falling off (*nirjara*) and liberation (*mokṣa*), together with *jīva* and *ajīva*, are sometimes spoken of as the seven principles of Jainism.

Absolute freedom from attachment is necessary for achieving liberation or *nirvāṇa*. It can be attained through devotion to one's self-being absolutely free from attachment to any other thing or person. Knowledge of the reality, devotion to the *tirthan̄-karas* and the scriptures, self-control and penance lead to heavenly happiness, but not to liberation. *Nirvāṇa* is attained by realisation of the true nature of the self. Right conduct is the main constituent element of the path.

The motive which leads a man to strive for liberation (*mokṣa*) is nothing but the desire to avoid the pain and to attain a sense of relief. It is also a state of pure and infinite knowledge (*ananta-jñāna*) and infinite perception (*ananta-darśana*). In the *samsāra* state on account of the *karma* veils this purity is sullied, and the veils are only worn out imperfectly and thus reveal this and that object at this and that time as ordinary knowledge (*mati*), testimony (*śruta*), supernatural cognition, as in trance or hypnotism (*avadhi*), and direct knowledge of the thoughts of others or thought reading (*manahparyāna*). In the state of liberation however there is omniscience (*kevala-jñāna*) and all things are simultaneously known to the perfect (*kevalin*) as they are. In the *samsāra*

stage the soul always acquires new qualities, and thus suffers a continual change though remaining the same in substance.

4.ii. Liberation or *Nirvāṇa* according to the Buddhists

Nirvāṇa is the highest goal, the ultimate objective of human aspiration and the sumnum bonum of rational life and was declared by the Lord Buddha in his clarion voice to the suffering denizens of the three worlds (*traidhātuka*) as the panacea to the ills and sufferings of existence, to which all sentient beings from the smallest creature amoeba to the highest God are subject without exception. And this ideal state, in which all suffering and pain are extinguished totally and irrevocably, was declared by the master to be within the reach of all mortals, provided they elected to pass through the course of discipline which was styled the eight fold path (*astāṅgikamārga*). Whatever be the differences of views regarding the nature of *nirvāṇa*, all schools of Buddhism have accepted it to be the most cardinal principle of their religion and philosophy. ‘*nirvāṇam śāntam*’ (*nirvāṇa* is the only calm) is the corner stone on which Buddhist philosophy and religion stand and which gives the distinctive character that marks it out from other religious and philosophical disciplines. The persistent refusal of the master to discuss the metaphysical implication of *nirvāṇa*, which was rightly regarded by him as a mater of idle speculation

without ethical and spiritual value, has, however, become a fruitful source of polemics among his followers and modern scholars too. The schools, into which later Buddhism has become divided, hotly debated with one another on this all important problem and were sharply divided in their opinions as to whether *nirvāṇa* meant cessation of passions and sufferings only, or of existence altogether. The emphatic denial of an individual soul, the ego principle, by all sections of Buddhist thought has naturally given support to this negative conception and the result is that Buddhist *nirvāṇa* is believed by all and sundry as a state of total annihilation of all existence, conscious or non-conscious.

Buddhaghosā refuses to believe *nirvāṇa* to be an absolute ceasing of existence. According to him, *nirvāṇa* is ceasing of suffering, of lust, of hate and of delusion; but from this one cannot come to the conclusion that *nirvāṇa* is the absolute extinction of existence also. All is impermanent, all is essenceless and *nirvāṇa* is the only calm; this three-fold teaching of lord Buddha is the foundation stone of the edifice of Buddhism. The *nirvāṇa* can be attained only if a man follows the eight-fold path of moral practices. These are viz., (i) Right faith (*samyak dr̥ṣṭi*). (ii) Right resolve (*samyak saṃkalpa*), (iii) Right speech (*samyak vāk*). (iv) Right action (*samyak karmānta*)), (v) Right living (*samyak ājīva*). (vi) Right effort

(*samyak vyāyāma*), (vii) Right thought (*samyak smṛiti*) and (viii) Right concentration (*samyak samādhi*).

This eight-fold path is known as the *ārya-aṣṭāṅgika-mārga*. As the Ganges goes towards the east so the follower of the *aṣṭāṅgika mārga* goes towards the *nirvāṇa*. This has been explained by Buddha again and again. Buddha does not believe in any extra-mundane God who will help us in the attainment of *nirvāṇa*. One himself has to work out his *nirvāṇa*. For Dr. Radhakrishnan “*nirvāṇa* is neither annihilation nor existence as we conceive it, but it is becoming one with the eternal reality, which Buddha does not explicitly admit”.¹

The view that for Buddha the *nirvāṇa* means in the extinction of evil passions gets support by the fact that he teaches again and again that the world is burning on the fire of old age, passions etc.; and while explaining *nirvāṇa* he uses the analogy of the extinction of fire. He says that the whole world is burning. It is burning on the fire of *rāga*, *dveṣa*, *moha*, *tanhā* and *jarā-marana*. It is clear from this that in his mind *nirvāṇa* was the extinction of the fire of *samsāra*, the fuel of which is passions, cravings (*tanhā*) etc.

Nirvāṇa is regarded as a state of enlightenment, which removes all ignorance. It is a state of perfect equanimity, which removes attachment.

aversion and delusion. It is a state of stainless purity and good will. It is a state of perfect self-possession and unconditioned freedom. It is a state of perfect peace. The liberated person has complete insight, complete passionlessness, and unruffled calmness, perfect self-control, tranquillity of mind, tranquillity of words and tranquillity of deeds. He is devoid of egoism or the sense of individuality since his mental grasping, ignorance and craving, which produce a new individual of five aggregates, are completely destroyed leading to a total extinction of individual existence.

The Buddha says, “There is something that is not born, not produced, not created, not compounded. Where there not something not born, there would be no possible exit for what is born”²

If the meaning of the word ‘*nirvāṇa*’ is analysed, it is found that *nirvāṇa* in Buddhism is, ultimately, escape from *duḥkha* i.e., from suffering, pain, misery, sorrow, and also from the lusts, enmity, and stupidity which inevitably entail suffering. Thus ‘*nirvāṇa*’ for a Buddhist, is a state of sentient existence conceived as something totally free from *duḥkha*.

It might be mentioned here that *nirvāṇa* and the path leading to it, are respectively the third and fourth of the Four Noble Truth preached by the lord Buddha. It is to be noted here that Buddha’s doctrine of *anāttā* (“no-soul” or no-self”) does not stand as an obstacle to the way of this

explanation of the moral development of an individual being. In fact, he believed that a large part of human misery was due to the ill-founded belief in a permanent individuality and the consequent craving after one's own good.

The annihilation of pain and misery is a truth realised by Buddha himself. The annihilation of all suffering is *nirvāṇa*. The *Pāli* word, *nibbāna*, means the absence of craving; the Sanskr̥it word, *nirvāṇa* which comes from the root *va* ("to blow") and the prefix *nir* ("off" or "out"), means, "the blowing out". The predominance of the negative explanation of *nirvāṇa* resulted in the erroneous notion that it is nothingness or annihilation. *Nirvāṇa* is "freedom, but not freedom from circumstances; it is freedom from the bonds with which we have bound ourselves to circumstances".³ Although *nirvāṇa* consists in the annihilation of suffering, it does not necessarily imply the immediate extinction of the body. Buddha continued to live a long life after his attainment of *nirvāṇa*.

The various views falling under Buddhism are broadly classifiable under two heads, which go by the name of *hīnayāna* and *mahāyāna*. These terms are variously explained, the most common explanation being that they signify respectively the 'small way' and the 'great way' of *nirvāṇa*. The discussion would remain incomplete if we do not mention the views

regarding *nirvāṇa* of *hīnayāna* and *mahāyāna* - the two schools of Buddhism.

Hīnayāna aims at the attainment of *arhathood* or individual *nirvāṇa* while the *mahāyāna* aims at the attainment of *bodhisattvahood* to liberate all. The former aims at individual *nirvāṇa* whereas the later aims at universal *nirvāṇa*. According to *hīnayāna* thinker, one cannot achieve within this *samsāra* while the *mahāyāna* philosopher believes that *nirvāṇa* is achieved through *samsāra*. The former regards *nirvāṇa* as cessation of transmigration and the latter regards it as transcendental experience of *Śūnyatā*. The *hīnayāna* is called *theravāda* or *sthaviravāda*, or the doctrine of the elders. It is the small vehicle, which can carry a few to *nirvāṇa*. The *mahāyāna* is the great vehicle, which is large enough to carry all to *nirvāṇa*.

The *hīnayānī* considers himself afflicted with three kinds of misery (*duḥkha*) viz., (a) suffering due to mental and physical causes (*duḥkha duḥkhatā*). (b) that inhering in caused and conditioned existence (*samskāra-duḥkhatā*) subject as they are to origin and destruction and (c) that due to transformation of pleasurable sensations into painful ones (*vipariṇāmaduḥkhatā*). He seeks release from these miseries incidental to life in any of the three worlds *kāma*, *rūpa* and *ariupa* (including the six ordinary forms of existence) by realising the formula of the law of

causation (*pratītyasamutpāda*), the four *āryasatyas* and the transitoriness (*anityatā*) and essencelessness (*anātmatā*) of the things of this world and the miseries to which these lead. The *hīnayānī* admits that their *nirvāna* consists in liberation from the three kinds of *duhkhatā*, incidental to existence in the three *laukikadhātus*. Thus, according to the *hīnayānic* conception, beings obtain liberation by attaining *nibbānadhadhātu* without any residue.

What the *mahāyānī* endeavours to point out is that the *hīnayānī* concern themselves with the realisation of the non-existence of a permanent entity like soul (*pudgala-nairātmya*) and not of the non-existence of anything whatsoever supposed to exist i.e. *dharma-nairātmya*. According to the *mahāyānī* thinkers, this realisation attained by the *hīnayānī* cannot lead them to the ultimate reality; it carries them only up to a certain distance towards the truth. Hence *nirvāna* in the real sense of the word cannot be said to have been attained by them. The adherents of the *hīnayānī*, however, consider that they reach *nirvāna* when they know that they will have no more birth as they have led the life of holiness (*brahmaccarya*) and realised the *pudgalanairātmya*. Some think, as the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* puts it, that *nirvāna* is attained by comprehending what is really soul or personality; while others think that it is attained by penetrating into the truth that things are dependent on causes. But, in fact, the *lankāvatāra*

adds, there is no real emancipation (*mokṣa*) without the realisation of *dharma-nairātmya*. So the *hīnayānī* do not actually reach mokṣa; they are only tossed up and down by the properties (*lakṣaṇa*) of things like a log of wood tossed by the waves.

Those who belong to the *hīnayāna* sect hold the view that *nirvāṇa* is for and by the individual himself. It is the difficult path of self-help. Its goal is *arhathood* or the state of the ideal saint who obtains personal liberation, *nirvāṇa*, which is regarded as the extinction of all misery. *Mahāyāna*, the great vehicle, the big ship, which can accommodate a much larger number of people and can safely and securely take them to the shore of *nirvāṇa* from the troubled waters of the ocean of *samsāra*, dubs earlier Buddhism as *hīnayāna*, the small vehicle. To the *mahāyāna* the idea of *nirvāṇa* in *hīnayāna* is something negative and egoistic. It has been held by them, that *nirvāṇa* is not a negative cessation of misery but a positive state of bliss. Its ideal saint is *Bodhisattva* who defers his own *nirvāṇa* in order to work for the *nirvāṇa* of others. Buddha is here transformed into God and worshipped as such. He is identified with transcendental reality and is said to posses the power of reincarnation. The Buddha is the absolute soul running through all the so-called individual souls. He is the Noumenon behind all phenomena. The *Bodhisattva* is he who attains perfect wisdom, ever dwells in it, and inspired by the love of all beings.

ceaselessly works for their ‘*mukti*’, which is to be obtained here in this world. He is ready to suffer gladly so that he can liberate others.

It might be pointed out here that as ideals of these two sects of Buddhism are different it is quite natural that they admit two different paths to *nirvāṇa*. *Hīnayāna* is mostly negative, whereas *mahāyāna* is purely positive. In *hīnayāna* school more emphasis has been laid down on abstention from evil and on ascetic practices than on doing good to others whereas the service of living beings and the practice of ‘*pāramitās*’ have been regarded by the *mahāyāna* school as the means to reach the shore of *nirvāṇa*.

‘*Bodhisattva*’ is an ideal in *mahāyāna*. He is social and actively busy in serving the living beings whereas ‘*arhat*’ is an ideal in *hīnayāna* who is seclusive and self centred and is always busy in meditation and other ascetic practices to acquire the *yogic* power for the attainment of *nirvāṇa*.

“An *arhat* was introvert while a *Bodhisattva* was an extrovert”⁴

Now the question is : Is it possible to reconcile the *hīnayāna* and the *mahāyāna* views regarding ‘*nirvāṇa*’?

Regarding the nature of *nirvāṇa* various Buddhist texts like *kathāvathu*, *viśuddhimāgga* and *abhidharmakoṣa* and the *prajñāpāramita*,

Mādhyamika vṛtti and *lankavatāra sūtra* come to an agreement and this points of agreement are as follows :

- (i) *Nirvāṇa* is inexpressible (*nisprapañca*); it is unconstituted, and has no origin, no decay and no change.
- (ii) It is to be realised only within one's own self (*pratyātmavedya* to the *mahāyānī* and the *paccattam veditabbam* (*viññūhi*) to the *hīnayānī*).
- (iii) It is not *abhāva* (absence of anything) as maintained by the *Sautrāntikas*.
- (iv) It is one and the same for all Buddhas, past, present and future.
- (v) *Mārga* leads to *nirvāṇa*.
- (vi) Individuality ceases in *nirvāṇa*.
- (vii) The *hīnayānī*, in agreement with the *mahāyānī*, holds that Buddhas possess extra-ordinary powers and knowledge and thus they are superior to the *arhats*. But they do not admit that the *nirvāṇa* attained by Buddha is different from that attained by the *arhats*. They thus deny the assertion of the *mahāyānī* that the status of the *nirvāṇa* of the *arhats* is something lower and not a perfect state.
- (viii) *Vimukti* (freedom) from afflictions (*klesa*) as an aspect of *nirvāṇa* is the same for *arhats* and Buddhas. The agreements and disagreements between the *mahāyāna* and *hīnayāna* schools as to the nature of *nirvāṇa* mentioned above, lead us to the following conclusion :

The *hīnayānic nirvāṇa* i.e. the *nirvāṇa* as described in the literature of the *Theravāda* school (*hīnayāna*), clearly refers to a Unity eternally existing beyond the three worlds (*kāma*, *rūpa* and *arūpa dhātus*). It is infinite, inexpressible, unborn, and undecaying. It is homogeneous (*ekarasa*) and knows no individuality. In it, there is no place for any discrimination or dichotomy. Many of the aspects of *ākāśa* (space) and the ocean bear comparison with those of *nirvāṇa*.

According to the *mahāyāna* school, however, the liberation (*nirvāṇa*) of man, is governed by the ‘either all or none’ principle; i.e. there can be no such thing as individual liberation. None can attain it either by all or. But this does not preclude the *hīnayānī* idea of a person’s making personal endeavours for his own liberation with a view to become an *arhat* (liberated being). On the contrary, the liberation of all would remain an unrealisable goal if all do not make personal endeavours for their own liberation. But this amounts to only a partial representation of the situation. And the completion of its representation would consist in the realisation that individual liberation, as distinguished from individual endeavour for liberation, which is legitimate, is a contradiction in terms for the simple reason that individuality, as Buddha rightly observed, is incompatible with liberation. All this amounts to saying that there is really no conflict between the *hīnayānī* ideal of *arhatship* and the

mahāyānī ideal of *Bodhisattvahood*, and that, strictly speaking, the latter contributes to the completion of what is partially represented by the former.

The discussion above shows that a Buddhist, whether he belongs to any of the schools, *mahāyāna* or *hīnayāna* admits liberation or *nibbāna*. But we know that a Buddhist does not believe in any persisting or eternal thing called soul (*ātman*) as that would contradict the basic tenet of Buddhism, viz., every thing is momentary (*sarvāñkṣaṇikāñkṣaṇikam*). Hence the problem is: how does the Buddhist reconcile with his non-belief in any persisting soul with the belief in liberation?

An attempt might be made to solve this problem in the following way. Two key notion of Buddhism are those of *anātman* (*Pāli anāttā*) and *nirvāna*. Lord Buddha was apparently interested to preach in his doctrine of *anātman* a phenomenological account of how things are rather than a theory. In his discourse to the wandering monk *vacchagotta*, he rejected both the theories of eternalism (*śāśvata vāda*) and annihilationism (*uccheda vāda*). The former, he stated, would be incompatible with his thesis that all laws (*dharma*s; *pāli dhammas*) are selfless (*sabbe dhammā anātta*): the latter would be significant only if one had a soul that is no more in existence. Thus, by not taking sides with the metaphysicians, Buddha described how the consciousness “I am” comes to constitute

itself in the stream of consciousness out of the five aggregates of form, feeling, conception, disposition and consciousness. The doctrine of "no-self" actually has two aspects : as applied to *pudgala*, or the individual person, and as applied to *dhammas*, or the element of being. In its former aspect, it asserts the fact that an individual is constituted out of five aggregates; in its latter aspects it means the utter insubstantiality of all elements. Intuitive realisation of the truth of the former leads to the disappearance of passions and desires whereas realisation of that of the latter removes all misconceptions about the nature of things in general. The former removes the "Covering of the passion" (*kleśāvaraṇa*); the latter removes "the concealment of things" (*jñeyāvaraṇa*). Together, they result in *nirvāṇa*.

Both negative and positive accounts of *nirvāṇa* are to be found in Buddha's teaching and in early Buddhistic writings. *Nirvāṇa* is a state of utter extinction, not of existence, but of passions and suffering; it is a state beyond the chain of causation, a state of freedom and spontaneity. It is in addition a state of bliss. *Nirvāṇa* is not the result of a process; were it so, it would be but another perishing state. It is however, the truth not of an eternal, everlasting substance like the 'ātman' of the *Upaniṣads*, but the truth of utter selflessness and insubstantiality of things, of the emptiness of the ego, and of the impermanence of all things. With the

realisation of this truth, ignorance is destroyed, and as a consequence leads to the destruction of all the craving, suffering and hatred.

Is *nirvāna* an actual place or locale? One tendency is to say no; for, if a Buddhist were to assert that there is such a place, he would have to accept the corollary that there is an absolute soul, since such a concept of *nirvāna* is grounded in the view of reality as substantive. Buddha, however, denied the concept of a substantive soul. As to whether or not there is complete extinction of the soul in *nirvāna*, it is often pointed out that the term *nirvāna* means, literally, a “blowing out”, just as candlelight is blown out. *Theravādī* Buddhists tend towards such an interpretation and distinguish between *nirvāna* and *parinirvāna*. The notion of *nirvāna* reminds us of the notion of *jīvanmukti*, whereas the notion of *parinirvāna* reminds us that of *videhamukti*. Buddha entered the former at the time of his enlightenment and at death passed into *parinirvāna*, which means utter extinction i.e. no longer participating in any desirable form of existence nor, indeed in non-existence. Furthermore, if there is no absolute soul, there is no ego to be defended when attacked or honour to be upheld when insulted. Thus non-violence is more apt to be chosen. Unity with one’s fellowmen is more likely, as self-pride does not stand in the way. Openness and communication are present when pride is absent.

Finally, the attaining of *nirvāṇa* is a major result of accepting the *anātman* doctrine. Liberation is gained when the I is lost.

Though the Buddhists do not accept the eternity of soul yet they accept the doctrine of transmigration and they attribute *karma* to be the cause of rebirth. This apparent contradiction needs some consideration. In the absence of some eternal and permanent soul, who would enjoy the rewards of the *karmas*? When 'I' is not there, then teachings to attain mokṣa are meant for whom? Who is called the '*karmadāyāda*' the kith of *karmas*? In reply to all these questions, the Buddhists hold that it is the continuity of *karmas* what becomes manifest in succeeding lives. In the rejection of soul they associate the role of cause and effect into the single concept of *karma*. In dealing with this question they do not enter into the subtleties of the transmigration, which takes place without recourse to a soul. The Buddhists did not admit the existence of soul, but recognised that the final realisation of the process of *karma* is to be found in the ultimate dissolution called *nirvāṇa*.

As it has been mentioned previously Buddhist philosophical principle involved in the canonical Buddhism is the theory of the non-existence of the soul. This theory is a logical deduction from the theory of impermanence. Buddha did not admit the existence of any permanent, unchanging reality. In consistency with his theory of universal change,

Buddha denies the existence of an abiding substance called soul. According to Buddha, the soul is the stream of consciousness. Consciousness is ever changing. It is a continuous flux like a stream. This continuous flow of mental states is the soul. Buddha does not deny the existence of soul. He denies the existence of an unchanging and abiding soul apart from the changing mental states. *Nirvāṇa* has been held by some Buddhists to mean extinction of desire, and non-extinction of existence. Mind remains tranquil and unperturbed when the desires disappear forever. *Nirvāṇa* is a calm state where all desires are extinct. Total extinction of existence cannot be the ideal. Buddha spent forty-five years of his life in active preaching and doing good. This proves that *nirvāṇa* is not complete annihilation of being or existence. But Buddha's refusal to admit the reality of any permanent and eternal soul or soul seems to contradict the view that *nirvāṇa* is not a state of complete annihilation of being. The upholders of the view that *nirvāṇa* is not a state of extinction of being come to the conclusion that Buddha never denied the reality of a permanent being, though he rejected the idea of the empirical soul. *Nirvāṇa* is becoming one with the eternal reality, which Buddha does not explicitly admit in so many words. As there is no soul according to Buddhist philosophy, the question of transmigration of a soul does not arise; but there are deeds -- good and bad which continues to effect of the previous deeds. There is rebirth of karma; there is

reincarnation. This rebirth, this reincarnation, this reappearance of the conformations is continuous and depends on the law of cause and effect. The good deeds will continue in blessings while bad deeds will continue in curses.

There is no entity here that migrates, no self is transferred from one place to another; but there is a voice uttered here and the echo of it comes back.

This cycle of re-embodiment should not be confused with reincarnation or transmigration of the soul, for Buddhism does not believe in such phenomenon; it rather refers to the transference of *kārmic* accumulations or residues from the disintegrative moment of death to a new womb of conception. The *kārmic* accumulations therefore fix the potential seeds (*bija*) of fructification in a future life. These seeds, which are accumulated by acts of the present and preserved from acts of the past, furnish the basis for the causation of expectant individual existence as based on the law of retribution, which keeps us, entrenched in the eternal cycle of birth, death, and reembodiment. Thus the series of existence - in the form of past, present and future life - revolves round these "potential seeds" or causal factors, otherwise called *karma*.

Action (*karma*) leads to rebirth. There is no transmigration of a permanent soul from one body to another. There is mere continuity of the

same series of mental processes. The last mental act ceases, and transmits its causal energy to the first mental act in a new embryonic germ cell. The last conscious act dies away, another conscious act arises in a new organism. This is called rebirth.

In rebirth here is ‘transmigration of character’, in the words of Rhys Davids, from the last conscious act in one life to the first conscious act in the next life. Moral responsibility attaches to the same series. Buddha says, “To say ‘one acts, another reaps the fruits of those acts’, is not true. And to say ‘one and the same both acts and is affected by the result’ is not true. I teach a midway between both extremes, to wit, the doctrine of becoming by way of cause”.⁵

Striving for the liberation of all and not simply for the little soul (*hīnātman*) was, therefore the logical outcome of this philosophy of the unity of all beings. Moreover the idea that the transcendental reality is not away from but within the phenomena paved the way for the belief that perfection or *nirvāṇa* is not to be sought away from the world but within it.

In this context it is necessary to clarify the meanings of two words, viz., *nirvāṇa* and *parinirvāṇa*. In Buddhist scriptures references are frequently made of two kinds of (*nibbāṇa*) *nirvāṇa-sopādiśeṣa* and (*parinibbāṇa*)

parinirvāṇa-anupādiśeṣa. Actually there are not two kinds of *nirvāṇa* but one single *nirvāṇa* receiving its name according to experience of it before and after death. *Nirvāṇa* experienced before death is called *sopādiśeṣa nirvāṇa* which the Buddha experienced first while he became supremely enlightened under the *Bodhi* tree in Buddha *Gayā*. The great decease of Buddha at *Kuśīnagar* is called *anupādiśeṣa* (*parinibbāṇa*) -- *parinirvāṇa* i.e., *nirvāṇa* without any remainder of any physical existence. To differentiate between the two the *anupādiśeṣa nibbāṇa* is called *parinirvāṇa* or *mahāparinibbāṇa*.

The *hīnayāna* (*theravāda*) Buddhists try to interpret and make a distinction between *nirvāṇa* and *parinirvāṇa*. So here lies the difference between *nirvāṇa* and *parinirvāṇa* which means utter extinction -- no longer participating in any desirable form of existence nor, indeed, of non-existence.

4.iii. A comparison of Buddhist theory of *Nirvāṇa* with the Hindu theory of *Mokṣa*

Although Buddhism did not interfere with Hindu customs and usages, allowing its adherents to approach Hindu or local supernatural powers for immediate favours, Hindu criticism of Buddhism came mainly from *Brāhmaṇa* philosophers who opposed the Buddhists because they rejected

the authority of the *Vedas*, and the *Brahmin* and the doctrine of 'ātman' (soul) and because they admitted persons of any age and caste into monastic life.

Moreover, contrary to the theories of the *Upaniṣad*, Buddha did not want to assume the existence of the soul as a metaphysical substance, but he admitted the existence of the soul as the subject of action in a practical and moral science. Life is a stream of becoming, a series of manifestations and extinctions. The concept of the individual ego is a popular delusion, the objects with which people identify themselves - fortune, social position, family, body, and even mind - are not their true souls. There is nothing permanent, and if only the permanent deserved to be called the soul, or ātman, then nothing is soul. There can be no individuality without a putting together of components. This is becoming different and there can be no way of becoming different without a dissolution, a passing away.

To make clear the concept of no - soul (*anātman*), Buddhists set forth the theory of five aggregates or constituents (*skandhas*) of human existence :

- (i) Corporeality or physical form (*rūpa*), (ii) feelings or sensation (*vedanā*), (iii) ideations (*sañña*), (iv) mental formations or dispositions (*sankhāra*) and (v) consciousness (*viññāṇa*). Human existence is only a

composite of the five aggregates, none of which is the self or soul. A person is in a process of continuous change, with no fixed underlying entity.

The term *nirvāṇa* also comes in the *Upaniṣads* and *Bhagavadgītā*. It means there the perfect soul realisation and the consequent reunion with the supreme soul. But in Buddhism it is often used in the sense of extinction. In *Abhidhamma - mahāvibhāsa - Śāstra* the following derivations of the word *nirvāṇa* are given as follows :- ‘*vāṇa*’ means the ‘path of transmigration’ and ‘*nir*’ means ‘leaving off or being away from’. Thus *nirvāṇa* means ‘the leaving off permanently all the paths of transmigration’. Again ‘*vāṇa*’ means ‘stench’ and ‘*nir*’ means ‘not’. Thus *nirvāṇa* means ‘a state altogether free from the stench of vexatious *karmas*’. Again ‘*vāṇa*’ means ‘a dense forest’ and ‘*nir*’ means ‘to get rid of permanently’. Thus *nirvāṇa* means ‘a state which is permanently free from the dense forest of the skandhas, the three fires (of lust, malice and folly) and the three attributes of things (viz., origination, sustenance and destruction)’. Again ‘*vāṇa*’ means ‘weaving’ and ‘*nir*’ means ‘not’. Thus *nirvāṇa* means a state, which is free from the thread of vexatious karmas and in which the texture of birth and death is not to be woven.⁶

The *Bodhi* can best be compared with *sthitaprajña* of the *Gītā* who has not renounced the world after liberation but acts like all other bound men,

but in a different spirit and for a different purpose. He acts in a purely disinterested way (*niṣkāma bhāva*) and for the universal welfare (*loka samgraha*).

Before concluding our discussion regarding the Buddhist conception of *nirvāṇa*, we may have here a brief account of the views which have been held by the *vaiṣṇavite* schools of the *vedānta* on this subject. In this regard it is most important to note that the *vaiṣṇavites* are agreed among themselves in ruling out the annihilationist doctrine of liberation advocated by *Śankara*. Liberation, in their view, is the way of self-realisation, instead of self-annihilation. But then, they are equally opposed to the isolationist view of self-realisation held by the *nyāya-vaiśeṣikas*, the *sāṃkhya-yoga* and others, according to which, liberation consist in the realisation of the soul as an isolated being. This view, as the *vaiṣṇavites* hold, is based upon the misunderstanding of the individuality of the soul as its egoity, due to the misleading influence of *avidyā*. So the primary requirement of the realisation of liberation, according to them, is the elimination of the *avidyā* and the consequent understanding of the true nature of the individuality of the soul. But then, while they hold in common that the soul as an individual is by no means separate from, but is, on the contrary, related to *Brahman*, they differ from one another as to

the exact nature of the relation between the individual and the absolute that is *Brahman*.

As has been previously observed, the relation in question has been differently conceived by the different schools of *vaiṣṇavism* and is characterisable as substantive-attributive (*Rāmānuja*), difference (*Mādhava*), identity in difference (*Nimbāraka*), pure identity or non-difference (*Vallabha*), or inconceivable identity in difference (*Caitanya*). Accordingly, *Vaiṣṇavism* comes to hold that liberation is the realisation of the individuality of the soul understood in terms of its relation to *Brahman* in any of these ways. But this, no matter whether or not it provides any indication about the nature of human liberation, certainly serves to reiterate the *Vaiṣṇavite* views about the ontological situation of the individual soul vis-à-vis *Brahman*. Of course, the relation between the individual soul and the *Brahman* conceived in any of these manners is, in the view of *Vaiṣṇavism* as in the view of *Sankara*, pregnant with transcendental felicity or blessedness. But that points towards the valuational aspect of the ontological situation of the individual and does not seem to have anything in particular to do with the practical problem of human liberation. What is especially noticeable about the *Vaiṣṇavite* conception of liberation lies in its being informed with a religious significance. In consequence, liberated life is conceived to be a life of

self-surrender, of devotion (*bhakti*) to and worship of the Lord. But the question is : Does it really show the way to the achievement of liberation or does it rather increase the burden of bondage? Shortage of space and fear of diversion, however, does not allow the present writer to go into a detailed discussion here. However, we must admit that *Vaiṣṇavism* does a single service to the cause of religion by putting its veto on both the annihilationist and isolationist doctrines of liberation.

It would, perhaps, be appropriate to begin our enquiry into the Buddhist view of liberation by mentioning, even at the cost of repetition, the main ideas concerning bondage and liberation which are equally shared by the major schools of Indian philosophy, including Buddhism. The first and the foremost of these ideas is that bondage pertains to and indeed is inextricably bound up with empirical life as such, and that it is due to a kind of (*avidyā*) ignorance on the part of the soul that participates in empirical life. This idea is necessarily connected with the idea that bondage is universal to mankind. Another idea is that bondage is invariably, if not necessarily, attended with suffering.

Buddha's four noble truths and the related eightfold path are a quiet but persuasive means of initiation into the process leading to individual *nirvāṇa*. It is through a realisation of the Four Noble Truths that the individual attains "highest complete enlightenment", the following being

the fruits of his realisation. While *Brāhmanism* made virtuous conduct the means to achieve status in the sequence of rebirths of the individual soul, Buddha made his ethical disposition the means to achieve *mokṣa*, *nirvāṇa* or liberation. Buddha rejected the *Brāhmanic* ideal of the soul's (*ātmā*) absorption in the universal soul (*Brahman*) replacing it with the idea of pure mind, a compassionate heart, an inward detachment from material world with a simultaneous outward expression of right conduct.

Thus, it can be concluded in the following manner :

Cosmic beliefs : *Karma* and *samsāra* (transmigration) are the cosmic beliefs of Hinduism. To them Gods (*saguna*) are essentially different symbols of impersonal pantheism. They believe in endless wheel of incarnations, even for Gods. They believe that fulfilling one's '*dharma*' will lead to a better incarnation, perhaps as a God. The especially devotee may hope to merge with the "All one" (thus losing personal identity for ever). Asceticism and mysticism are the features of liberation, according to Hinduism. Buddhism is, however, originally a revolt from Hinduism and a "purification" of *Brāhmanic* doctrine and reincarnation is the cosmic belief in Buddhism. To them evil is the result of unrealistic desires. The world is guided by Buddhas ("enlightened ones"). They try to escape from the eternal wheel of "*Karma*" and "*Samsāra*" by following the "Noble eightfold path". They believe in monistic mysticism.

The heterodox Buddhism derives its idealism, monism, absolutism, the theory of momentariness of all worldly things, the theory of karma, the distinction between the empirical and the absolute standpoints the theory that ignorance is the root - cause of this cycle of birth and death and that *nirvāṇa* can be attained by right knowledge alone, however, resembles *Upaniṣads*.

Since bondage is universal to mankind and since it is invariably attended with suffering, there arises idea that all men, being situated in a state of bondage on account of their unavoidable admission into empirical life, are condemned to suffer. But in spite of the admission of all this in the world of human beings, there still prevails in the sphere of Indian thought the unusually optimistic idea that these two viz., bondage and suffering are open to liquidation, and that liberation is the legitimate culmination of human destiny and is within the reach of man. Besides these ideas which are common to all schools of Indian philosophy, there is another unanimously accepted contention which as follows. It is absolutely necessary that the empirical life, being ex-hypothesis a life of bondage should pass through some basic change or other in order that human existence may show itself to be the veritable testimony of the state of liberation. And it is at this point that the schools of Indian philosophy begin to differ from one another. As we have previously seen, they are

certainly not unanimous as to the kind of change which empirical life needs with a view to the realisation of liberation. We have also seen that they differ among themselves as to the nature of the state of liberation itself. And, as will be shown later, their difference from one another is equally pronounced with regard to the means of the realisation of liberation (*mokṣa sādhana*).

It might be noted that the *hīnayāna* view of *nirvāṇa* has a close similarity with the view of *nyāya-vaiśeṣika* theory of liberation; but the *mahāyāna* Buddhism describes the state of liberation as a positive state of bliss or happiness. One must admit that in this respect, the *mahāyāna* view is closely similar to that of the *advaita vedānta* and perhaps it would not be wrong to some extent at least to call Śāṅkarācārya “*Pracchanna Buddha*” or concealed Buddhist.

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