CONCLUSION

In the foregoing chapters we have done a detailed survey of early Buddhism. In this chapter we shall gather together our conclusions.

1. Gautama the Buddha propounded his religion for the welfare of mankind from his personal meditation. He was inspired by the existing worldly sufferings. He wanted to preach a new religion which was applicable to all individuals without any distinction. He was shocked by the Vedic ritualism and the caste system. Besides, he was also shocked by the suffering that people had to undergo in this world in the form of disease, old age and death. The suffering of mankind pained him. He meditated hard and discovered a way out. He propounded a new way of life, the way of wisdom, which would help man transcend suffering. After the attainment of his wisdom he preached new doctrines to the five ascetics who had been his associates. Then, till he lived, he went on preaching his new way of life. His doctrine involved the Four-Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the Middle Path, the Theory of Dependent Origination, the Theory of Anātmavāda and the Theory of Ksanikavāda.

2. As there were no written copies during the life time of the Great Master, his three intimate disciples namely
Mahākassapa, Ānanda and Upāli collected his doctrines in three collections called the 'Tipitaka' or 'Three Baskets'. They are the Vinaya, the Sutta and the Abhidhamma respectively. In these Pitakas they collected all the words of the Buddha and kept it as written copies for the future generation. This happened in the First Buddhist Council.

Then from the Second Council due to dissention among the Buddhist monks Buddhism was divided into Heterodox and Orthodox systems. Heterodox system was known as Hinayana or Theravāda and the Orthodox was Mahasanghika or Mahayana. Then, in course of time, the two schools were again subdivided into many schools. The school of Theravāda was divided into ten sub-classes and the Mahayana into eight sub-classes. But there were more than eighteen schools in Buddhism. Though there were many schools in Buddhism, philosophically the most important schools were Vaibhāṣika, Sautrantika, Madhyamika and Yogācāra. They were accepted as the principal schools by both the Eastern and Western thinkers. Among the principal schools of Buddhism, the Sarvāstivāda school is also one of the most important schools of Hinayana Buddhism.

Then at the Third Council, during the time of Asoka, the canon of Buddhism was first spread in Sri Lanka (Ceylon). Asoka sent Mahendra and Sanghamitra to preach the religion there so that Buddhism could be a world religion.
Then, during the time of king Kaniska, there was a Fourth Council to collect the canonical text. It prepared elaborate commentaries on the three Pitakas. During his time the old quarrels and disputes among the Buddhist monks could cease. In his lifetime Sarvāstivāda became an important school with its strength. But it had its downfall during the reign of Harshavardhana.

After the death of king Kaniska and the invasion of Portuguese Buddhism ceased to be a force in India. But this religion was accepted by many countries of the world and became a world religion.

3. The Vaibhāsika school is separated from the Sarvāstivāda. The principal doctrine of this school is that perception and conception are the two sources of knowledge. They accepted the authority of the Abhidhamma and rejected the authority of the Vedas.

The Vaibhāsika developed their philosophy on atomic view. They held that all objects are composed of four elements viz, earth, water, fire and air. They divided their dhammas into conditional and unconditional. The conditional order is based on phenomena, while the unconditional are space and Nirvāna. They believe with the Sautrantika view that both the mental and the non-mental are real.
Unlike the Vaibhāsikas the Sautrantikas held that objects are inferred and not perceived. They also denied the philosophy of the Theravāda and the Sarvāstivāda and accepted only the original doctrines of the Pāli canon. They also refused the Vinaya and the Abhidhamma and adopted only the Sutta to be the original doctrine of the Buddha. While agreeing the theory of atomism and momentariness of the Theravāda and the Sarvāstivāda, they opposed on the principal doctrine of the Sarvāstivāda that everything exists in the three periods of time. Like the Theravādins they admit only the present existence.

The concept of Nirvāṇa is contrary to the Vaibhāsika. According to them Nirvāṇa is beyond the empirical process and cannot be treated with the particulars. They conceived Nirvāṇa to be beyond both the conditional and unconditional order of dhammas. The Vaibhāsikas give their emphasis on commentaries, while the Sautrantika took their inspiration only from the original Buddha-Suttas.

The Madhyamika adopted the concept of the middle path of the Buddha, but there is a difference between these two systems. The concept of the middle path of Buddha is between the self-indulgence and the self-mortification, while the middle path of the Madhyamika is the non-acceptance of the two extreme views of existence and non-existence.
The Madhyamika philosophy is based on Pratityasamutpāda which gives much emphasis on Sunyata. According to this school all the experience of the phenomenal world is under constant illusion and voidness. And behind this phenomenal world there is a reality which is devoid of the phenomenal character. This is indescribable and is known as Sunyata. According to this system things are interdependently related to each other.

The Yogācāra school maintains that consciousness alone is real. The main philosophy of this school is that there is no extra-mental reality. Further, they admit that objects are not directly known. On denying the Sautrantika view the Yogācāra admits that what the mind knows is its own idea and not object. And the mind does not know the relation between the idea and the object.

4. The Theravāda school adopted the teachings of the Buddha such as, anitya, duhkha, anatman, pratityasamutpāda. The goal of Theravāda is to attain Arhathood, that one can strive for Nirvāṇa. The important thinkers of this school are: Buddhaghosa, Nāgasena, Buddhadatta and Dhammapala. The Theravādins recognise all the three Pitakas and original teachings of the Buddha.

Buddhaghosa's philosophy depends upon the theory of knowledge and ethics. On the other hand, Nāgasena's
philosophy deals with a comprehensive exposition of metaphysics, ethics and psychology. Then Buddhadatta and Dhammapala developed the philosophy of Buddhaghosa.

5. Buddhism is not a unitary system but a combination of different systems. The views of the Theravādins followed all the teachings of the Buddha. On the other hand, all the remaining schools modified the original doctrines and developed their philosophies in their own ways.

Unlike the Theravādins the Sarvāstivādins' philosophy is based on psychology. They neglected the Vinaya and adopted the Sutta and the Abhidhamma Pitaka. They give more emphasis on metaphysical views. The most important point of this school is to explain the essential characteristics of the seventy five dhammas. The important thinkers of this school are Vasubandhu, Sanghhabhadra, Asvaghosa and Katyayaniputra.

Vasubandhu's philosophy is based on psychological analysis and introspection. Whereas, the philosophies of Sanghhabhadra and Asvaghosa are based on realistic and epistemological grounds. Katyayaniputra's philosophy, which is the last one, is also realistic and distinguishes between real and unreal.
6. As both the Theravāda and the Sarvāstivāda belong to the Orthodox group, there are some similarities between the two schools.

(i) The two schools believe in the plurality of elements out of which the entire world is made.

(ii) Both the Theravāda and the Sarvāstivāda school adopt mind and matter as the two component parts forming the metaphysical dhamma.

(iii) Both of them agree that a being is made of five elements constituting material and non-material. They exist momentarily and cause new sets of existence.

(iv) Like the Theravādins, the Sarvāstivādins adopt the doctrine of dhammas, body-mind dualism and the doctrine of perception. The Theravādins and the Sarvāstivādins believe in the doctrine of Karma and Nirvāna. Nirvāna is attained by transcendental knowledge.

(v) Both the schools have their own canon such as; the Sutta, the Vinaya and the Abhidhamma. Despite there are some differences, there is substantial similarity between the Pāli and the Sanskrit Vinaya and the
Sutta literature. According to Takakusu, there are some points of similarities between the Puggalapāññatti a Pāli Abhidhamma text, and the Sangitiparyaya of Sarvāstivāda. "Conze maintains that the passages in which the texts of the Theravādins and the Sarvāstivādins agree word by word, we can assume that they were composed at a time preceding the separation of the two schools, which took place during Asoka's rule".¹

Though there are some similarities between the two systems they have differences also.

(i) The principal point of difference is that, Theravāda school recognises only fifty one dhammas. They held that these dhammas are compiled with saṃskṛta (condition) and asaṃskṛta (uncondition) states. Out of these fifty one, nirvāṇa is asaṃskṛta. While the Sarvāstivādins adopt seventy five dhammas. They contend that out of seventy five dhammas seventy-two are saṃskṛta and the remaining three are asaṃskṛta. The three categories of saṃskṛta dhammas are: (i) Pratisankhyanirodha, (ii) Apratisankhyanirodha and (iii) Ākāsa.

(ii) The next point of difference is that the Sarvāstivādins accept the existence of five dhammas
(elements) in all the three periods of time whether in past, present and future. While the Theravādins deny such existence and accept only the present existence as real. The Theravādins show that if the past and the future exist then their existence should be predicated in the same way as of the present. The Sarvāstivādins maintain that all dhammas exist but not always and everywhere in the same form. In giving reply the Sarvāstivādins say that the past and the future exist but not exactly in the same form as one would speak of the present. They contend that the 'dhammas' or (bhavas) of the past are transmitted into the present and the 'dhammas' of the future into the present.

(iii) The Theravādins adopt the fundamental teachings of Buddha viz., impermanence, suffering and substance. But the Sarvāstivādins developed only the impermanence and substance. The former contend that everything is momentary and subject to disintegration. The later held that beings and objects constituted out of the dhammas are subject to disintegration but not the dhammas themselves, which always exist in their subtlest states.
(iv) The Karma theory plays one of the most important roles in Buddhist thought. The Theravāda school followed the traditional definition that 'mind is karma'. In Early Buddhism the emphasis was put on the human mind. Mind precedes all actions and serves as the principal element both in performing and assessing deeds. It is mind that rules and shapes action. Words and deeds are also produced by the mind. The Sarvāstivāda school also followed the Early Buddhist doctrine as the Theravāda school. But this approach to the Karma theory is different from that of the Theravāda.

(v) The Sarvāstivādins interpreted the Karma theory in view of epistemology rather than psychology. It established a unique formulation in terms of Karma. Epistemologically this school analysed the relationship between cause and effect. That is, the concept of avijnapti (the unmanifest faculty) is peculiar to this school. But this view is not found in the Theravāda school.

(vi) According to the Sarvāstivāda, all Arhats are not completely perfect. But the Theravādins do not accept this view and believe that an Arhat is completely emancipated and perfect. To the Theravāda an Arhat
has destroyed raga, dosa and moha forever. The Sarvāstivādins, on the other hand, maintain that an Arhat persist, raga, dosa and moha and these may reappear and cause an Arhat fall from Arhathood.

(vii) The contents of the seven Abhidhamma books of the Sarvāstivādins differ from those of the seven Abhidhamma books of the Theravādins. The Jñānaprasthāna was the most predominant book among the Sarvāstivādin works. Likewise, the Patthana was the most important in the Theravāda Abhidhamma Pitaka.

(viii) The Theravāda developed their literature in Pāli while the Sarvāstivāda in Sanskrit. In wording and in the arrangement of the text, the Sanskrit canon has great similarity to the Pāli canon, but on the other hand, there are many points of difference too. An important explanation of this is that both canons had a common source, probably the last Magadhi canon from which the Pāli canon branched off in one part of India, and the Sanskrit canon in another district.

7. In both the Sanskrit canon of the Sarvāstivādins and the Vinayas of the Mahisāsakas, Dharmaguptas and
Maha-Sanghikas show manifold divergences in separate details from the Pāli canon and from one another, not as regards the rules of the Pratimoksa, but also as regards the rules of the Vinaya in general. Nevertheless, the original stock of rules is one and the same.  

8. The Nikayas of the Pāli canon find their parallel in the Agamas of the Sanskrit canon; the Dirghagama is corresponding to the Dighanikaya, the Madhyāmagama to the Majjhimanikaya, the Samyuktāgama to the Samyuttanikaya, and the Ekottāragama to the Ānguttaranikaya. But fragments are not always in agreement with the corresponding Pāli texts. On the other hand, there are in the Abhidharmakosa-Vyakhya, several quotations from Brahmajala sutta, which much have corresponded to the Pāli text. 

9. The comparison of the Chinese Āgamas with the corresponding Pāli Nikayas also have shown both agreement to a considerable extent, and notable divergences. The Chinese Tipitaka contains ten different translations belonging to the Hinayana and seven to the Mahayana and the only thing they have in common is the external form, inasmuch as they contain speeches which the Buddha is supposed to have uttered prior to his death.
There has to be an expletive to the conclusions. As the thesis is more or less historical and descriptive in nature, we could not 'theorise' on the data handled by us. We had to be satisfied with tracing the growth of the systems, their mutual interactions, similarities and differences. It is so about all groups belonging to a particular religion, but it is more so about Buddhism. For Buddhism, practised by any school or sect, ultimately owes its allegiance to the teachings of the Buddha. Therefore, there is a common thread running through all the schools of Buddhism. At the same time every school must have its peculiarity for which it is different from others. This is exactly what we have tried to find out in the present thesis.
References:

