CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION
In the preceding chapters, an elaborate exposition of meditation in general and in Theravāda and Prasaṅgika Madhyamika in particular, has been given. Now an attempt is being made to make some critical comments in this concluding chapter. Before doing so, let us recapitulate in brief the issues discussed in the foregoing chapters.

In Chapter-I, viz., Introduction, the root meaning and the various other senses of the term "meditation" has been explained. Its usage in secular, sacred and pejorative senses has been mentioned. The usage of it as a synonym of the term "Yoga" has also been given. The aim of both meditation and Yoga is to attain the final goal of ultimate freedom variously called as moksa, Kāivalya or nirvāṇa. A brief history of the origin of mediation or Yoga since the Vedic times has been attempted. A cursory account of some paths of meditation
has been given. Further, the objective and the scope of the thesis have been clarified. And an outline of the themes discussed in the succeeding chapters has been given in the introductory chapter.

Chapter-II, namely, "The Nature and Types of Meditation", began with a note that ultimate liberation is the predominant theme of Indian Philosophy. Yoga or meditation is the means of attaining the final deliverance from sorrow. As all other systems, Buddhism too aims at the freedom of man from suffering. It has advocated meditation as the only means of attaining enlightenment and perfection. In dealing with the nature of meditation it has been pointed out that meditation is not a conceptual but a practical affair of directly experiencing the reality. Its purpose is to open the doors to the treasure house of wisdom. It is a mistake to think that meditation or Yoga is meant for obtaining the supernatural powers like clairvoyance, clairaudience, levitation and so on. The sole purpose of meditation is to achieve the supreme value. An exposition of the important schools of meditation in Indian philosophy such as Jñāna, Yoga, Rāja Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga and the Buddhist Yoga of the Eightfold path has been made.

Jñāna Yoga is the way of knowledge originally proposed by the Upaniṣads and later developed by the Advaita Vedānta. Ignorance of the distinction between the Self and not-self is the root cause of sorrow. Identification of the individual soul with the Universal Soul
leads to liberation. Discriminative knowledge of the Self and the world gives freedom. Jñāna Yoga prescribes four important requirements that the seeker has to fulfil for the attainment liberation. They are: the discriminative knowledge between the permanent and the impermanent, the infinite and the finite; dispassion of controlling the mind from attachment and hatred; cultivation of the virtues like tranquility, self-control, non-possession, patience, sincerity and concentration; and, a strong longing for liberation. Longing for deliverance consists of three stages, namely, studying and hearing the sacred scriptures; intellectual analysis and understanding of the acquired knowledge; and lastly, concentrating and meditating on the intellectual knowledge and understanding of the ultimate reality. It leads to the direct intuition and realization of the Brahma.

Raja-Yoga is the path of concentration and meditation comprising eight steps, namely, yama, niyama, āsana, prānayāma, pratyāhāra, dhāraṇa, dhyāna and samādhi. Patanjali is the proponent of Rāja Yoga which has its roots in the ancient Indian tradition itself. The first two steps comprise the abstentions and observations. The third and fourth steps are a preparation for the meditative practice. The fifth is the withdrawal of the mind from the senses and their objects. And the sixth step is the practice of concentration on the various objects, physical, mental and divine. And the seventh step, namely, meditation is the intensified and extended
form of concentration. It leads to the final step, namely samādhi, which proceeds by two main stages, namely, saṃprajñāta and asaṃprajñāta which gives final freedom, (kaivalya).

Bhakti Yoga is the path of devotion and love to God. Bhagavad Gīta regards it as the best and the easiest way of reaching the final goal. Those who take an unconditional refuse in God and meditate on Him with extreme faith will be liberated soon. Lord Kṛṣṇa says that performing actions as offering to God without the idea of agency will lead to liberation. Sages like Swami Vivekananda says that one single moment of the madness of extreme love of God will bring eternal freedom. Freedom consists in the transcendental unity of love, the lover and the beloved.

Karma Yoga, the path of action, is considered to be the most fundamental type of Yoga, since action is synonymous with our life. Everyone has to perform some action or the other as long as one is alive. And Yoga consists in performing actions without motive and expectation of results. Action performed in meditation is that which is devoid of desire and anger. Lord Kṛṣṇa says that Karma Yoga is not renunciation of action but renunciation of the fruits thereof. Performing actions with a sense of duty and sacrifice will bring liberation. Swami Vivekananda says that the secret of work lies in being calm and quiet 'within' even in the midst of loud noise 'without'.
The calmness of the Yogi 'within' is a testimony to his intense work all the time.

And finally, the chapter deals with the Buddhist eightfold Yoga, the fourth and the last noble truth taught by the Buddha as a means of attaining nirvāṇa. The main purpose of it to liberate man from sorrow caused by the ignorance of desire or thirst. The path consists of eight steps, namely, right view, right thinking, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. The last three steps constitute the meditative part of the path. The approach of the Theravāda and Mahāyāna to the meditative part has been explained. The origin and the points of difference between the two schools have been elucidated. A distinction between the ideals of the arhat and bodhisattva has been made. The origin and the salient features of the Prāsaṅgikā Mādhyamikā have been mentioned. A brief survey of the Theravāda and the Prāsaṅgikā methods of meditation has also been made in this chapter.

In Chapter-III, namely, "The Four Noble Truths", we have stated that the four truths discovered by the Buddha embody the entire teaching. They are the basis for the multifarious Buddhist systems and doctrines that arose in course of time. They are the organized version of the origin and cessation of the problem of suffering. They are a systematic elucidation of the dependent arising and cessation of
suffering. The four truths are the truth of suffering, the arising of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path leading to the cessation of suffering. The first truth says that life from birth to death is full of suffering. Here an elaborate description of sources of suffering has been given. The body composed of the six senses devoid of any soul is a source of suffering. Transitariness of everything and ignorance of desire arising out of the body is the main source of suffering.

The second truth of the arising of suffering explains the dependent origination of suffering. It teaches that suffering is not an absolute fact but relative to causes and conditions. It arises out of a casual series beginning with ignorance. The chain consists of twelve links, namely, ignorance, perception, consciousness, six-sense organism and so on. This shows that the Buddha has explained the arising of suffering through the natural principle of the conditioned co-production. It is based on the law that "this being, that arises". Buddha’s explanation of the arising of suffering is scientific and practical to the core. There is nothing dogmatic or sentimental about it. He held that since suffering arises depending upon its cause, it is possible to eradicate it by eliminating its cause, namely, ignorance, the deep night wherein humanity has long been circling round.

Explaining the third noble truth of the cessation of suffering it has been stated that cessation lies in reversing the causal process of
suffering. The second truth says that 'this being, that arises', whereas the third truth says that 'this not-being, that does not arise'. Elimination of ignorance is necessarily followed by elimination of suffering. Clear comprehension of the dependent arising of suffering leads to the detachment of oneself from the cycle. Withdrawal of oneself from the causal chain puts an end to suffering. Desire can no more arise when there is the complete knowledge about it. Knowledge extinguishes lust for sensation and fulfillment just as the flame without fuel. Insight into the transitoriness of the fetters of existence extinguishes thirst, the main cause of suffering. With the extinction of thirst, its effect, namely, grasping is extinguished. With the extinction of grasping, its effect namely, becoming is annihilated. Similarly the remaining causes and their effects will be extinguished leading to cessation of suffering.

Dealing with the fourth and final truth, namely, the path leading to the cessation of suffering it has been pointed out that the preceding three truths provide an intellectual knowledge about the nature, origin and cessation of suffering. The insights they offer are still inferential and indirect. The Buddha has advocated the noble eightfold path for transforming the intellectual and inferential knowledge into a direct and non-dual one. The practice of the path changes the 'impersonal' knowledge into 'personal' one. That is, the monk will experience the cessation of suffering personally and
directly. Treading along the path gives a penetrating wisdom that actually puts an end to suffering. It leads to the actual realization of the ideal of nībbāna, which is a state of knowledge, peace and perfection. An exhaustive account of the each step of the path with an emphasis on the last three steps, namely, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration has been given. The four kinds of efforts, the four kinds of mindfulness and the four states of meditation in the state of samādhi have also been explained. Samādhi, the quintessence of the eightfold path, marks the full attainment nībbāna, the total cessation of suffering and the beginning of bliss.

In chapter- IV, namely, "Meditation as Steadfast Mindfulness-The Theravāda Way" we have extensively dealt with the nature and application of mindfulness as it has been elucidated by the Buddha in the Pali Canon, namely, Ānapāna Sati Sutta and Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. We have also made a reference to a number of other sources dealing with meditation as mindfulness. The chapter has been discussed under the following headings, namely, the nature of mindfulness, mindfulness of the breath, the body, the sensations, the mind, and the mental and physical phenomena.

In dealing with the nature of mindfulness, it has been held that mindfulness is a very important method of the Buddhist meditation. Mindfulness is the seventh step of the noble eightfold path and the
penultimate step to samādhi. Since it plays a crucial role in the attainment of nibbāna, the Buddha has recognized it as the heart of the practice. It is the sure way of reaching the goal of perfection. Mindfulness instills in the mind the mood and attitude of being steadfast in awareness. It is useful both for the worldly and transcendental life. In Pali, right mindfulness is rendered as satipatthāna. "Sati" means being aware of or attending to the present. 'Pattana' means placing near one's mind. Satipatthāna means presence of mindfulness, the direct confrontation with the actuality, including one's own mind. It aims at merging of everyday life with meditative practice. Its approach to life transcends the conceptual thought and knowledge. Its emphasis is on awareness of here and now leading to insight into the object of meditation. Mindfulness therefore is known as seeing things in a special way (vipassana bhāvana). It reveals the truth of the Buddhist doctrines of no-self, impermanence and dependent arising. It aims at a clear comprehension that totally destroys ignorance and sorrow. As the concentrated intuitive activity of cognition, mindfulness is the foundation of all forms of the Buddhist meditation. The power of mindfulness has to be gained by constant practice of focusing attention on a definite object.

To begin with, the Buddha has prescribed the breath as the best and the most conducive object of mindfulness. One should begin
mindfulness by being mindful of the breath. Breath is chosen as the first object, since it is easily and always available to the practioner. It is a living and unceasing process which we can be mindful whenever and wherever we want. Also, breath is life in miniature, the microcosm of our entire personality. Perfect mindfulness of the breath leads to the mindfulness of all other phenomena. Next we have given a detailed explanation of the application of mindfulness as it is contained in the Satipatthāna Sutta of Dīgha Nikāya. We have dealt with the steadfast mindfulness of the body, the sensations, the mind, and the mental and physical phenomena. We have dealt with the mindfulness of the body in its six aspects, namely, body postures and movements, clear comprehension, repulsiveness of the body, primary elements and nine kinds of corpses. The mindfulness of the body in all its dimensions gradually leads to the cessation of attachment to the body. Sensations are comprehended in their soullessness, impermanence and insecurity. The pleasant, unpleasant and neutral sensations are found to be causal and dependent arising. Thus the mindfulness of sensations gradually leads to the fading away of the ignoble feelings. Similarly, the steadfast mindfulness of different states of mind like anger, hatred, indolence and so on is explained as revealing their soulless, impermanent, and insecure nature.

And lastly, we have shown how the monk is mindful of the whole of his mental and physical organism. The monk applies
mindfulness to five hindrances to Insight such as craving, ill-will, indolence, agitation and worry. Next, he is mindful of the five aggregates, namely, the body, the sensations, the perception, mental formations and consciousness. He is also mindful of the twelve sense-bases, namely, the eye and forms, the nose and smells, and so on. He is mindful of the seven links of enlightenment such as knowledge, effort, satisfaction, and so on. And lastly, the monk enters on the path of being mindful of the nature and meaning of the four noble truths. He diligently keeps his mind on the noble truth of suffering and comprehends the truth that everything from birth to death is suffering. He steadfastly keeps his mind on the second noble truth of the arising of suffering and comprehends the truth that craving through the five groups of grasping is the cause of suffering. Similarly, the monk applies mindfulness to the third noble truth of the cessation of suffering. He gains a clear comprehension of the dependent cessation of suffering. He realizes that the causal chain of suffering can be cut by cutting at the root of the ignorance of grasping and clinging to the six sense machine, namely, the personality. And finally, the monk is mindful of the practice of the path leading to the cessation of suffering. The monk steadfastly treads the eightfold path from right view to right concentration, namely, samādhi. Thus he attains the four stages of meditation leading to a state of equanimity
and absolute purity of mind transcending pain and pleasure. This is the state of final deliverance from sorrow, known as nībbāna.

In Chapter-V, namely, "Meditation on Emptiness – The Mahāyāna way", the Prāsaṅgikā Mādhyamikā method of meditation has been expounded. Meditation on emptiness is the denial of inherent nature of all phenomena. It is comprehending the truth that there is no such thing as the "Self" which exists independently of the phenomena. Everything exists in mutual relation and dependent arising. Nothing is an exception to the principle of conditioned co-production. Šūnyatā is not total nothingness or a vacuum but the absence of intrinsic being. Even Šūnyatā is subject to dependent origination. Emptiness is also empty of inherent being. Nāgārjuna has taught not only emptiness but also emptiness of emptiness. (śūnyatā śūnyatā). The Prāsaṅgikā meditation aims at establishing the nominalist position that everything exists contextually comes into being and goes out of being depending upon certain causes and conditions. Things are like a reflection in a mirror and grasping an abiding self amidst the ever changing and impermanent phenomena is ignorance, the source of delusion, hated and sorrow.

A clear comprehension of emptiness is the only solution to ignorance and sorrow. Analytical meditation of deconstructing the self is the only direct method of grasping emptiness in its true sense. Meditation on emptiness steers clear of the extremes of eternalism and
annihilationism, permanence and total destruction, substantialism and nihilism. It reveals the praśna which reconciles the division and separation between the mundane and the transcendental. It teaches that the two realms are not exclusive. In its ultimacy, the mundane itself is transcendental. In its final nature, saṁsāra itself is nirvāṇa. In its ultimacy, the determinate itself is the indeterminate. That is, the sūnyata nature of saṁsāra is nirvāṇa. Thus meditation on emptiness teaches the undivided truth (advayadharma) which is all inclusive, peaceful and blissful.

The nature and purpose of the Prāsaṅgikā meditation on emptiness has been expounded in great detail beginning with its nominalist ontology. Next a clear and exhaustive account of the nature of analytical meditation on emptiness has been elucidated. Application of analytical meditation to the concept of self-substance has been elaborated. The several arguments advanced by Nāgārjuna against the concept of the “self” have been presented. We have shown how the meditative analysis accomplishes the task of establishing the emptiness of the “self”.

We have corroborated the emptiness of the “self” by applying analytical meditation to the I and the body. Both the “I” and “body” are only convenient designations to refer to the complex of name and form. There is no such entity as the I or the body which is independent of the collection of psychological attributes and physical
parts. The chapter has been concluded by elucidating the ten perfections which the bodhisattva adopts for the completion of his meditation on emptiness. The ten perfections are complementary to the dialectical meditation. Their cultivation to perfection transforms the intellectual knowledge of emptiness into a practical one. With the rigorous practice of the perfections the bodhisattva attains the direct and undivided knowledge of the emptiness of everything, himself and the world.

Let us now have a critical look at the Theravāda and Mahāyāna methods of meditation. As it has already been indicated, in regard to Mahāyāna, the thesis confines itself to the Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamikā only. The comments that are being made here relate to the systems of meditation of these two schools only.

The Theravāda meditation is a means of attaining the arhathood. Arhat is the ideal of the meditation as mindfulness. Arhat means the destroyer of enemy. The term is derived from two other terms, "ari" and "han". Ari means enemy and han means to destroy. Arhat is one who destroys the enemy of passion. He is the ascetic in whom the four intoxicants—desire, lust for rebirth, false opinion, and ignorance—have dried up. He is beyond the categories of merit and demerit, and indifferent to worldly entanglements. Karmic law cannot hold the Arhat who attains total enlightenment when his life comes to an end in parinirvāna.
The Prāsaṅgikā meditation is a means of attaining the goal of
the bodhisattva. Bodhisattva means the great mind. He is the one
who seeks to realize all the merits of the Buddha. "Bodhi" means the
way of the Buddha and "sattva" means the individual. Bodhisattva
seeks to realize the knowledge of all forms and beings. He keeps
himself in rapport with every situation and renders help to others.
His thought and resolve to cultivate the virtues of the Buddha is as
indestructible as the diamond mountain.

It is often held that the Theravāda meditation is not as
comprehensive as that of the Prāsaṅgikā. The knowledge that the
former brings about is incomplete which is useful only to those who
seek for their own liberation. It liberates the seeker from the round of
births and deaths but with an excessive emphasis on the notion of
impermanence. That is why the arhat falls to the extreme of clinging to
impermanence as the ultimate nature of things. The arhat simply
detests old age, disease and death and puts an end to all kind of
passion including compassion. He tends to attain nirvāṇa
straightaway without entertaining any idea of serving others. On
realizing that the individual is devoid of the self and all that is
composite is impermanent and painful, the arhat, like the deer that is
besieged and hit by a poisonous arrow, grows anxious and seeks to
get rid of all things amounting to nihilism.
But the Prāsaṅgikā method of meditation is all comprehensive. It reveals the emptiness of all phenomena, external and internal. The knowledge it brings about is imbued with love and compassion for all beings. Although the bodhisattva too has a distaste for old age, disease and death, he seeks to examine things and penetrate to their true nature. He goes deep into the twelve linked chain of causation, comprehends the non-ultimacy of the basic elements of existence and enters the limitless realm of the dharma-dhātu. The bodhisattva is like the emphant which, having entered the hunter's net and hit with a poisonous arrow, looks at the hunter with kindness and compassion. It remains absolutely composed, free from fear and anxiety. The great elephant leads the herd to the camp, moving forth in peaceful gait. In the same way, the bodhisattva of the Mahāyāna tradition does not straightaway go to nirvāṇa. Before doing so he cultivates great love and compassion for the welfare of all beings. He meditates and works for the liberation of everyone from sorrow.

The Theravāda meditation aims at the realization of the atoms as the ultimate constituents of the elements. The Sarvastivādins believe in the ultimate reality of the physical and mental phenomena. They hold that the atoms are the ultimate reals of all the phenomena. And meditation aims at the realization of the knowledge of the atoms as the ultimate reals. But rejection of atomism and the doctrine of elements is the basis of the Mahāyāna system of meditation. The
Mādhyamikās maintain that clinging to the atomic elements as ultimates obstructs meditation. Nāgārjuna holds that atoms of any kind have no place in the teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha has not mentioned even the name of atoms in his teachings. Mādhyamikā meditation exposes the indeterminate nature of the atoms also. Atoms too are subject to śūnyā, the indeterminate dharma. In their ultimate nature, atom too are empty of inherent nature. Thus the Mādhyamikā meditation is more rigorous and thorough-going than that of the Theravāda.

The Prāsaṅgikā Mādhyamikā meditation aims at removing the false sense of the absolute existence. Theravāda regards impermanence as the arising and perishing nature of things. It takes impermanence to mean momentary existence. This is only to fall back upon the false notion of eternalism. Nāgārjuna argues that if a thing can really exist even for one moment, it could exist for all time. But the teaching of impermanence is intended to teach indeterminacy as the ultimate nature of things. Impermanence means devoid of birth and death. Nāgārjuna holds that even when things seem to exist they do stay but pass away. Staying of things means their persistent passing away. Meditation in Mahāyāna penetrates the passing away of things which is śūnyatā. It awakens us to the truth that the ultimate nature of things is Śūnyatā, the profound meaning of the impermanence.
The Prāsaṅgikā analytic meditation on emptiness is more comprehensive in another sense also. Theravāda meditation is confined to the mindfulness of the breath, the body, the sensations, the mind and thoughts, and the dhamma. Whereas, the Prāsaṅgikā meditation analyses different kind of the phenomena in the world. Nāgārjuna’s Treatise on the Middle Way (Mūla Mādhyamikā Kārika) contains twenty seven chapters. In each chapter he analyses a particular category and exposes its emptiness. He employs several ways of meditating on the emptiness of the categories like the self cause, time, space, atom, including saṁsāra and nīrvaṇa. He discloses the false network of reasons or arguments that tend to substantiate the category under investigation. The variety of meditative approaches makes the analysis stronger and more thorough. Finally, the meditator comes to the realization that things do not have an inherent existence. On ultimate analysis, the intrinsic being of the phenomena is unfindable. The Prāsaṅgikā meditation is more inclusive also because it is supplemented by the ten perfections. The realization of emptiness is buttressed with the perfections so that the bodhisattva works for the well-being of all beings in all the worlds.

The Prāsaṅgikā meditation on emptiness discloses the middle way in its right sense. Rather, middle way is at the root of the meditation on emptiness. Middle way is not the combination of the extremes of inherent existence and total non-existence. Middle way is
rejecting the inherent existence and not the existing itself. Not finding
a thing the way we are accustomed to find it, does not mean that it is
utterly non-existent. Meditation on emptiness accomplishes the
middle way by making a distinction between not finding something
and finding it to be non-existence. For instance, the inherent
existence of a table is not found after analytical meditation. But
although an inherently existent of the table is not found, its non-
existence is not found. The table exists conventionally, for the
conventional existence of the table is not negated by analytical
meditation. Analytical meditation determines whether an object
inherently exists or not. It does not reject the conventional existence
at the empirical level.

Nevertheless, it may be pointed out that the meditative methods
of Theravāda and Mahāyāna are not opposed to each other. None of
them is contrary to the teaching of the Buddha. Both are in
conformity with the doctrines of no-self, impermanence and
dependent arising. But, the Theravāda interpretation of these
doctrines is not as broad as that of the Mahāyāna. Its meditation is
not as inclusive as that of the latter. Arhat is not as altruistic as the
bodhisattva. Yet it is not correct to say that they are opposed to each
other. We can only say that the arhat comes first and the bodhisattva
comes next. It means that the bodhisattva is an extension of the
spiritual personality of the arhat. So also, the Mahāyāna system of
meditation and the Prāsaṅgikā Mādhyamikā meditation on emptiness in particular, may be said to be a development over the Theravāda meditation of steadfast mindfulness. It is said that the arhat is an introvert saint whereas the bodhisattva is an extrovert saviour. Both are the manifestation of the Buddha, the enlightened one. The charge that the arhat is self-centred is not justified. Arhat’s attitude of seeking his own salvation may be said to be in line with the Buddha’s teaching. The Buddha taught that self-help is the best help. Moreover, nīrūṇa basically means the ending of the “self” or individuality. When once the arhat attains nīrūṇa, there is no scope for egocentric life. In the absence of individuality there is no place for self-centred activity.

Complementarity between the Theravāda and Prāsaṅgikā methods of meditation can be established in respect of meditation as steadfast mindfulness also. Although the Prāsaṅgikā meditation on emptiness is analytical and compassion oriented, it is not altogether alien to the method of mindfulness. The Mahayanists, or the Mādhyamikās in particular, do not dispense with the seventh step of the eightfold path, namely, the right mindfulness. Meditation on the emptiness of inherent existence is carried out with steadfast mindfulness. Identifying and refuting the object of negation, namely, inherent existence involves mindfulness. It requires a high degree of mindfulness and clear comprehension. Analysis of the phenomena
with sustained effort and mindfulness alone will lead to the final step, namely, samādhi. There is also an echo of mindfulness in the bodhisattva's cultivation of the perfections. It is with utmost effort (uṣrya), concentration and meditation (dhyāna) that the bodhisattva practices the ten perfections. Concentration and meditation are the manifest forms of mindfulness only. Thus meditation as mindfulness establishes a close link between the Theravāda and Mahāyāna. It relegates to the background the differences, if any, between the two schools.