ABSTRACT
A STUDY OF THE BUDDHIST CONCEPT OF LIBERATION
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE MAJJHIMA NIKĀYA

The concept of liberation is one of the most fundamental concepts, a central notion of many different religious and philosophical traditions in the world. People always have desires for safety, happiness, perfection and particularly earnest desire for liberation from the bondage, suffering of body and mind. Such desires become a source of strong inspiration for the arising of almost philosophies and religions of the world.

Buddhism has been known as a peaceful religion carrying the Buddha message of love and wisdom for all living beings. The Buddhist concept of liberation has been seen to be one of the most practical concepts which have inspired many scientists or thinkers to discuss and explain it for improving human dignity. Thus liberation has been regarded to be the most essential teachings of the Buddha. For Buddhism, all attachments in this or that form are obstacles in the process of liberation. Besides, among the Buddha’s teachings, the Majjhima Nikāya, which consists of hundred and fifty two discourses (suttas), is the most reliable source of teachings of the Buddha preached on various occasions.

Thus, I decided to choose the subject: “A Study of the Buddhist Concept of Liberation with Special Reference to the Majjhima Nikāya” for my Ph.D. research. My thesis includes six chapters as follows:

The very first chapter of the thesis is “A Brief Introduction to the Concept of Liberation in Several Philosophical and Religious Traditions”. In this chapter, I present two main groups of religious traditions: (1) Prophetic religions and (2) Indian religions. The first group includes Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and
the others; the second group includes Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and the
others. Every successive religion has been more or less influenced by the previous
religions in theories as well as in practices; yet there exists some differences among
them. Most of the prophetic religions believe that the path leading to liberation is the
service of God or submission to His orders. On the other hand, according to Y. Masih,
most Indian religions agree with the fourfold pillar: Karma-Saṁsāra-Jñāna-Mukta.
The ultimate end for the early Hinduism was the attainment of Heavenly abode
(Svarga); however, in the extant Hinduism, it is the state of liberation (mukti) from the
endless cycle of birth and death.¹

The second chapter of the thesis is “The Buddhist Concept of Liberation in
Pāli Canonical Scriptures”. In this chapter the concept of liberation as discussed in the
Pāli canonical texts has been defined and analyzed in much detail, such as eight kinds
of liberation, five kinds of liberation, gradual liberation, etc.

Chapter three discusses “Liberation in the First Fifty Discourses,
(Mūlapaṇṇāsa) of the Majjhima Nikāya”. After presenting a general introduction to
the first volume, i.e., the Mūlapaṇṇāsa of the Majjhima Nikāya, the concept of
liberation as depicted in all the fifty sutta-s of it has been elaborately discussed.

Like the chapter three, the chapter four, “Liberation in the Second Fifty
Discourses (Majjhimapaṇṇāsa) of the Majjhima Nikāya,” after presenting a general
introduction of the second collection of the next fifty sutta-s of the Majjhima Nikāya,
the concept of liberation has been explored in all of them.

The chapter five is “Liberation in the Third Fifty Two Discourses (Uparipaññāsa) of the Majjhima Nikāya,” the last and final collection of the fifty two discourses of the Majjhima Nikāya.

Although the Buddhist concept of liberation has been depicted in detail in the above chapters, I focus and stress on the freedom of thoughts and speech as the effective means for eliminating shortcomings and superstitions, and improving human life.

Chapter six, the Conclusion, presents a summary of all the main points as presented in the previous chapters. Moreover, the Buddhist concept of liberation was analytically discussed in the light of other religious traditions. The middle path leading to the final liberation was also presented here as the noble eightfold path. And finally an attempt has been made to discuss how such teachings of the Buddha could be applied in order to get peace and happiness in daily life of men and women of this mundane world.

In carrying out the work, I have tried to follow various methods of Social Science research such as Historical method, Analytical method, Comparative method, and Critical method. The present study is mainly based on the Majjhima Nikāya and other related sources along with their translations in English.