PREFACE

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 sincere desires for safety, happiness, perfection and particularly earnest desire for liberation from bondage and suffering of body and mind. Such desires become a source of strong inspiration for the arising of almost philosophical and religious traditions of the world. There have been various solutions offered by philosophers, thinkers, prophets, leaders of religions, etc. with the common desire, i.e. liberation from any form of suffering for the attainment of true happiness. Buddhism has been known as a peaceful religion carrying forward the Buddha’s message of love, compassion and liberation for all living beings. The Buddhist concept of liberation is one of the most practical concepts, which has inspired many scientists and thinkers to discuss and explain it for improving human dignity. This fact is evident from the Buddha’s statement when He said: “Just as in the great ocean there is but one taste: the taste of salt; so in this doctrine and discipline, there is but one taste: the taste of liberation.”¹ Thus, Liberation is one the most essential teachings of the Buddha.

Moreover the Buddha’s spirit of liberation is not merely known as liberation from the cycle of birth and death (samsāra), but also the state of

freedom from any fetter caused by craving, hatred and delusion. This spirit may be suitably illustrated by the ‘Simile of the Raft’ in Discourse no. 22, “The Parable of the Water Snake” (Algaddupamasutta), that the dhamma is likened to be a raft “for crossing over, not for retaining” and “even the right dhamma is got rid, all the more of wrong ones.”² For Buddhism, all attachments in this or that form are obstacles for liberation.

According to Lord Buddha, craving and clinging, which originate from ignorance, are the root causes of all sufferings in this world. The path leading to the stopping of such sufferings is just the path eliminating or uprooting ignorance without remainders through practicing the Noble Eightfold Path (the Aṭṭhaṅgika Magga), namely (1) Right View, (2) Right Thought, (3) Right Speech, (4) Right Action, (5) Right Livelihood, (6) Right Effort, (7) Right Mindfulness, and (8) Right Concentration.

Historically, although Buddhism arose in the Indian subcontinent, all the teachings of the Buddha were firstly written down during the reign of King Vattagamini Abhaya (103-77 B.C.) in Sri Lanka, more or less four hundred years after the Buddha’s death.³ During that time these teachings were transmitted through memorization and recitation from the masters to their disciples. So the original teachings might have been mixed intentionally or unintentionally by local customs or unorthodox sources. However, the

Majjhima Nikāya, which consists of one hundred and fifty-two discourses (suttas), has been regarded as the most reliable source of the teachings of the Buddha who preached them on various occasions. Thus, the Buddhist concept of liberation may be profitably and faithfully illuminated through the investigation of these discourses in the Majjhima Nikāya.

We are living in the modern world, which is an amalgam of the multiple cultures and religions. The potential threats of violence, wars and social evils, especially religious conflicts are always present. The comprehensive knowledge of several cultures and religions may bridge the gaps among different faith groups. Every religion or tradition must be understood as one kind of flower among several kinds of flowers in a big garden. As such, every religion has its particular values deserved to be respected and protected. And the common purpose of all religions is to serve human needs.

Thus, with this idea in my mind I selected and decided to work on 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 First Chapter is “A Brief Introduction to the Concept of Liberation in Philosophical and Religious Traditions.” There are two main groups of religious traditions: (1) Prophetic religions and (2) Indian religions. The former includes Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and a few others; the latter represents Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and a few others.
Although every successive religion has been more or less influenced by the earlier religions in theory as well as in practice; yet there exist some differences among them. Most of the prophetic religions believe that the world has been created by God or Allah or Wahe Guru out of nothing and by His own will alone. The God, according to them, is the creator and the ruler of the whole universe, the only One who is omnipotent and omniscient.\footnote{Y. Masih, \textit{A Comparative Study of Religions}, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990, pp. 57-64, 93, 131.} These believers hold that the liberation can be had only with the grace of God though one’s deeds too are also important. Thus the path leading to liberation for men is fulfilled by good deeds, good words, and good thoughts as in the Zoroastrianism,\footnote{L.C. Casartelli, “Salvation: Iranian,” \textit{Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics}, ed., James Hastings, Vol.21, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1921, p. 137.} or obedience to God in Judaism, the service to God in Christianity,\footnote{Masih, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 106.} or submission to the mercy of Allah along with the due performance of the certain religious duties in Islam,\footnote{Edward Sell, “Salvation: Muslim,” \textit{Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics}, ed., James Hastings, Vol. 21, New York, 1911, p. 149.} and so forth.

The Second Chapter is entitled “The Buddhist Concept of Liberation As Depicted in the Pāli Canonical Scriptures.” Having inherited and greatly influenced by priceless heritage of the earlier ancient philosophical and religious traditions, Buddhism arose as one of the new reformed movements and developed with its own characteristics and specialization. The Buddhist concept of liberation has been known as one of the most practical concepts among all the existing religions. In the present 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, and so on. It also discusses the process of liberation case of Bodhisattva Siddhatthā (Siddhārtha) and the essential teachings of the Buddha in this regard.

The Third Chapter discusses “The Liberation as Gleaned from the First Fifty Discourses of the Majjhima Nikāya”. After a preliminary presentation of 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 the volume find elaborate discussion. The state of liberation has been described here in two ways: (1) freedom from the lower states of hell, animal, hunger ghost, etc.; and (2) attainment of peace, happiness, and finally nibbāna. The former often means the abandoning and abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, slandering, harsh speech, frivolous chattering, covet, malevolent, and wrong views. The latter means the attainment of the higher realms of heavens or nibbāna, i.e. the four fruits of recluse, the eight (or nine) absorptions (jhāna), the three kinds of super knowledge, six psychic powers, Brahma-world, etc. and the state as represented by the famous maxim: “this is not my, this am I not, this is not myself,” as has been repeated by the Buddha himself concerning the five aggregates of an individual.

8 I.B. Horner, tr., The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings, vol.1, pp. 52, 175, 185, 288.
The Chapter Four deals with “The Liberation in the Second Fifty Discourses of the Majjhima Nikāya.” After a general introduction to 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 Discourses nos. 83, 97, 99, and so forth describe the state of liberation as the attainment of the Brahma-world. However, the highest goal, as repeated by the Buddha, is the final state of liberation or nibbāna which one attains after practicing moral habits, concentration and wisdom (Sīla, Samādhi and Paññā). The path leading to liberation has been described in more detailed manner in several steps, viz., observing moral habit, controlling sense-organs, moderation in eating, intent on vigilance, remote lodging, getting rid of five hindrances, abiding in four or seven or nine stages of meditation, dwelling in or suffusing with the four Bhrama-vihāra-s, directing to three kinds of super knowledge, destroying all cankers and attaining enlightenment.

The Chapter Five deals with “The Liberation in the Third Fifty Two Discourses of the Majjhima Nikāya.” The state of liberation in these sutta-s has been markedly known as the state of final nibbāna in the sutta no. 106; as heavenly abode in the sutta no. 110; as overcoming the wrong views in the sutta no. 101; “incomparably highest realization” of the concept of emptiness (Suññatā/Śūnyatā) in the sutta no. 102 and so forth. The concept of emptiness first appeared in the Majjhima Nikāya and this concept was developed and

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10 Ibid., pp. 9-14.
further elaborated by the celebrated Ācāriya Nāgārjuna (150-250 CE)\textsuperscript{11} in his famous work, “Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way,” (Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā), as the fundamentals for the culmination of Mahāyāna Buddhism later. Especially, the theory of conditioned genesis (sutta no. 115 of the Majjhima Nikāya) has been emphasized by the Buddha by his famous teaching: “If this is, that come to be; from the arising of this that arises, if this is not that does not come to be, from the stopping of this that is stopped.”\textsuperscript{12} With this teaching, all conditioned phenomena have been seen as they really are. And liberation could be gained through observing this theory. Besides, liberation is also known as the freedom from the fetters of cause and effect as depicted in the discourse no. 135 of the Majjhima Nikāya when the Buddha taught: “Deeds are one’s own, beings are heirs to deeds, deeds are matrix, deeds are kin, and deeds are arbiters. Deed divides beings by lowness and excellence.”\textsuperscript{13}

The Chapter Six entitled “Conclusion,” presents a summary of all the main points as presented in the previous chapters. Moreover, the Buddhist concept of liberation has been 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, namely (1) Right View, (2) Right Thought, (3) Right Speech, (4) Right Action, (5) Right Livelihood, (6) Right Effort, (7) Right Mindfulness, and (8) Right Concentration. Finally at the end of this chapter the reader is also introduced to the basic characteristics of Mahāyāna Buddhism.


\textsuperscript{12} I.B. Horner, tr., The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings, vol.3, p. 107.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 249.
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. Although the Buddhist concept of liberation has been
discussed in detail in the above chapters, focus and stress have been given on
the freedom of thoughts and speech as the effective means for eliminating
shortcomings and superstitions, and also for improving human life.

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