PREFACE

The present study is a humble endeavour to compare and contrast Jaspers’ philosophy and early Buddhism on human condition and temporality. Though the above philosophies are separated and distant from each other in terms of time and culture, they come close in highlighting the fundamental problems of human existence such as temporality, historicity, suffering, freedom and transcendence. Both the philosophies aim at illuminating human condition and reawaking man to his own potentialities so that he can live an authentic life.

The problems of human existence are still relevant to the world even today. Looking outside, the world may have considerably changed, particularly in terms of advancement of science and technology. Yet, looking into the inner world of human condition, we find that not much has changed; the old forces of hate and love, happiness and sorrow remain with us regardless of places and time we live in.

Karl Jaspers is a German philosopher who, unlike other existentialist thinkers, studied medicine and worked as a psychiatrist before coming to the field of philosophy. He is regarded as a moderate thinker among existentialists, since he provides a very interesting example of an intermediate position between the two main groups of the theistic and atheistic existentialism. Kierkegaard, Marcel, belong to the first group, whereas Sartre, Heidegger and Nietzsche the second. Jaspers himself is a religious man, he, nevertheless, protests against a dogmatic approach of religion, which forbids man to exercise his freedom.

It is interesting to remark that Jaspers is, among the existentialists, the one who is deeply interested in Indian philosophy, particularly Buddhism. This is clearly evident from his work “The great philosophers”, in which he deals with the life and works of Buddha in a great detail. Jaspers is aware of
the distance between his own philosophy and Buddhism in terms of time and culture. Nevertheless, he believes that the remoteness of Buddhism needs not make us forget that we are all men, all facing the same question of human existence. So it is the problem of human condition that becomes a common forum for philosophical reflection by both remarkable philosophers; Jaspers and Buddha.

It has been suggested that it is difficult for us to do justice in comparing these great thinkers with each another as their philosophical ideas have been developed in different circumstances. Yet, it is believed that a comparative study of both philosophies may somehow enable us to see the fact that the problems of human condition have been a matter of concern of the great personalities since ancient time, and these phenomena are still facing us even nowadays. That is, man is always subject to situation, change, disease, old age, suffering, death etc. The philosophical ideas formulated by both Jaspers and Buddha lead us to one eternal philosophical truth; the *philosophia perennis*, which no one possesses, yet everyone has potentiality to realise. Keeping this fact in mind, we may regard both the philosophers as the eternal contemporaries.

All existentialist philosophers including Jaspers hold the same view that human existence cannot be defined in a specific term, because it has no essence as such; man first of all exists and defines himself afterward. Jaspers shows concern about the massive alienation of industrial society and the organization of contemporary political economics round the globe in which man is reduced to a cog in the giant machine of mindless productivity. For him, the future of mankind lies not in the advancement of science but in the understanding the value of human existence. Thus, Jaspers' philosophy can be characterized as follows:
(a) It is aimed at reawakening man to his immense potentialities, for Jaspers believes that the individual is endowed with something more than he can know about himself that characterizes his freedom and the quest for Transcendence.

(b) It takes a comprehensive approach to understand human condition, emphasizing that human nature is multi-dimensional. One-dimensional approach cannot exhaust the authentic being of man.

(c) It regards human nature to be fundamentally paradoxical. On the one hand, man is finite and historical as his life is entangled in natural and social order. On the other hand he is capable of rising beyond the limits of particular situations through freedom and transcendence.

(d) It argues that Transcendence can be realised in and through historicity.

Buddha, on the other hand, was a former prince, whose original name is known as Sīthatttha. He becomes Buddha when he realized Truth. What is this truth? Buddha clearly states that the truth he realizes is concerned with the real situation of existence. As such, it can be said that Buddhism begins with human condition and ends with human condition. That is to say, human condition like suffering, old age and death poses as the fundamental problem that, if rightly dealt with, can lead to find the Absolute Truth (Nibbāna), which is considered to be the end of human condition.

The approach that Buddha adopts to deal with the situation of man has provided a paradigm shift in looking at the ground reality of all things. In the Buddha’s time, there were numerous thinkers who had expressed their views and ideas on what is reality, particularly of human existence, and how to know or realize its essence, if any. In this connection, two prominent views; idealism of the Upaniṣads and materialism of the Cārvākas have been repudiated by Buddha. And at the same time, he presents the doctrines
of Paṭicca-samuppāda and Ariya-saccāni or the Four noble Truths to reflect on the problem of existence as well as its solution.

With regard to what is reality of existence, Buddha points out that human existence is neither eternal being nor non-being, since it depends on various causes and conditions. In this connection, Buddha analyses man in various dimensions like five aggregates (pañcakhandha), twelve bases (āyatanas) and eighteen elements (dhātus) to show that human nature is without substance and subject to change, suffering and death. Yet, Buddha also points out that man has potentialities to overcome these limitations provided that he follows the right path. It may be noted in passing that in the history of Indian thoughts, the problems of ontology and ethics have never been separated from each other.

In the present study, an attempt has been made to throw light on the following questions:

(a) What is the prime objective of Jaspers' philosophy and Buddha's Dhamma?

(b) What is the concept of man according to Jaspers and Buddha?

(c) What are similarities and dissimilarities between these two philosophies?

Given the above questions, we propose to discuss the philosophies of both Jaspers and Buddha in the following chapters:

The first chapter explores Jaspers' philosophy, its aim, its relationship with science and religion, the concept of the Encompassing on the one hand, and the salient features of Buddha's Dhamma and its aims on the other.

The second chapter deals with the concept of man analyzed by Jaspers, in which the notions of temporality, historicity, boundary situation, freedom and transcendence have been discussed.
The third chapter focuses on the Buddhist concept of existence, in which different dimensions of existence have been discussed in detail.

The fourth chapter compares and contrasts the philosophies of Jaspers and Buddha centering on the main issues: philosophy and Dhamma, concept of existence, temporality, suffering, freedom and transcendence.

Finally, the last chapter presents evaluation of the philosophy of Jaspers and Buddha and their relevance to the present situation.

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(Phramaha Chainarong Srimanta)