CHAPTER V

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The foregoing chapters constitute a kind of panoramic survey of Jaspers’ philosophy and early Buddhism on human condition and temporality focusing on the issues of temporality, historicity, suffering, freedom and transcendence. Now, in the concluding chapter, it is worthwhile to evaluate what we have already discussed in order to see the whole picture of this dissertation and to determine what is the contribution of it. First of all, it must be pointed out that we embark upon this journey on the assumption that though philosophies as formulated by Jaspers and Buddha are separated by time and culture, they come close with regard to their interest on the basic problems of human existence such as non-substantiality of existence, temporality, suffering, freedom and transcendence.

The philosophies of Jaspers and Buddha bring our attention to the existential situation of man. Of course, it is the situation of each and every one of us as a unique individual that both philosophies are concerned with. Both maintain that human condition is the synthesis of finitude and infinitude, temporality and transcendence. This is because of the fact that though man is in the bonds of temporality and suffering, yet he has an immense capacity to rise above these shackles. Man is not just bound to the given situation but can create a new situation as well. Therein lies the freedom of man.

As we have discussed earlier, Jaspers and Buddha have developed their philosophical ideas by rejecting the philosophical systems, that is, idealism and materialism. They want to point out that happiness is not
possible without leading authentic life based on the understanding of human situation and spiritual principles. Material welfare is not an end in itself, but it should be served as the way for the authentic life or spiritual success. Though Jaspers and Buddha equally criticize both idealism and materialism, yet, there is a slight difference in their vision of what kind of idealism they have rejected. Buddha is critical of the Upaniṣads' idealism on the ground that it goes against the law of Dhamma (Dhamma-niyama), which holds that everything is subject to change, suffering and without substance. The idealists believe that there is the ultimate reality (Ātman), which is eternal and full of bliss. Jaspers on the other hand criticizes Hegel's idealism for its emphasis on the sovereignty of reason. As such, both Jaspers and Buddha assert that human existence is always in the process of becoming.

Jaspers delineates limitations of idealism and materialism and proposes a new look to philosophy in order to awaken man to his immense possibilities. For him, the individual can neither be explained in terms of abstract theories nor in terms of the mere giveness. Buddha also states that human existence is neither an abstract form of self or soul nor a mere combination of material elements; it surpasses both idealist and materialist dimensions. He takes a balancing position between the theistic idealism of the Upaniṣads an the atheistic materialism of Cārvākas.

The similarities between two great thinkers on this point show that their philosophical ideas arise from the same spirit; the aspiration to know the truth despite the differences of social and cultural milieu. This strikes us to the fact that culture as well as the philosophical ideas set forth by the previous thinkers or philosophers play very important role in creating a situation that may lead to the atmosphere of free and fruitful critique and discussion. Consequently, both Jaspers and Buddha take idealism and
materialism as a starting-point for developing their philosophical ideas. For this reason, it can be said that philosophy cannot ever be developed in vacuum. This holds true not only of philosophies of Jaspers and Buddha but of other philosophies as well.

We have begun our study by making a comprehensive survey of Jaspers' concept of philosophy in which we have found that philosophy for Jaspers is not just a speculative enquiry dealing with abstract ideas. It is neither concerned with mere theory or practice. The idea and its practical implication should go hand in hand while philosophizing. But it must be understood that the word 'practical' does not signify that knowledge of philosophy can be put into practice and then verified scientifically, it simply means that for philosophy to be practical, it should help us illuminate our potentialities. This is the reason why Jaspers clearly says that philosophy is aimed at illuminating or awakening man's potentialities.

The valuable contribution to mankind made by both Jaspers and Buddha is that both make us acknowledge the authentic value of man. Man is not to be treated either as a cog in the machine or as a mere ideal creature. Jaspers has raised very good point when he says that a system-builder is just like an intellectual spectator, who is not aware of his own existence, and just remains in the realm of abstractions. The great philosophers like Buddha and Jaspers have shown that philosophy is not merely theoretical, or abstract thinking, but it brings a practical part as well. For example, one achieves the authentic life or attains Dhamma not through merely speculative thinking, but through actions.

As discussed earlier, Jaspers says that he owns his philosophical development to Kiekegaard and Nietzsche. Yet, Jaspers' contribution, in our
view, lies in his departure from these two great philosophers. That is to say, while Kiekegaard asserts that truth is subjectivity, which cannot be communicated to the other, Jaspers agrees with the thesis that truth is subjectivity, but argues that it can be communicated to the other in the existential manner. While Nietzsche declares that God is dead and urges man to create values for himself, Jaspers believes in the possibility of something beyond the world-orientation, which is Transcendence or God, and yet emphasizes that the realization of God is possible only through human freedom.

Jaspers states that the task of philosophy is philosophizing, which is the process of thinking that goes beyond the world of empirical existence. We agree with him that philosophy is aimed at making man aware of his situation and awakening him to immense possibilities. Jaspers rightly says that the significance of philosophy lies in the way in which it raises the question, and not in its offering ready-made answer. This is because we also believe that there is no absolute answer in philosophy; it is always on the way in search for the truth. Anyone who hopes for the 'once and for all' solution from philosophy would be in vain, because philosophical question cannot be solved in the same manner as in mathematics. For Jaspers, there is no absolute truth, whereas the Buddhist holds that Dhamma can lead to the Absolute Truth.

Considering Jaspers’ concept of philosophy, it would be worthwhile to remark that philosophy is not reserved only for the specialists as it is concerned with the situation of individual man. It is within the reach of a common man like you and me; it at least exists as potentiality if not as actuality. For this reason, we agree with Jaspers that nobody, as far as he is a man with a sound mind, can live his life without philosophizing.
Philosophy does not offer a ready-made answer to the question with which it is concerned. This should be seen as its strength rather than weakness, because it gives man the opportunity to actualize his freedom.

Jaspers' critique of scientism for its engagement in studying human existence only in terms of objective reality is still relevant, particularly in the present situation when the advancement of sciences seems to reach its peak. Jaspers is right when he points out that system can be applied only to what is closed and settled but not to man. This is because human existence in his view is open to endless interpretations; it cannot be put into a fixed form and then explained through any logically constructed system. It also cannot be completely investigated through scientific methods.

Though Jaspers criticizes scientism for its attempt to investigate man only in terms of empirical dimension, yet he praises the role of science for its contribution towards inquiring knowledge, which leads to advancement of technology and many disciplines like biology, physics, astronomy etc. For him, the main aim of philosophy and science is the same, that is, to attain the most certain truth. However, science accepts as real only what is known through empirical methods, while philosophy goes beyond the realm of world orientation.

At this point, it is worthwhile to catch a glimpse at what is science as clarified by the great scientist like Einstein. He makes it clear that science is methodical thinking directed toward finding regulative connections between sensual experiences. It leads to methodical action if definite goals are set up in advance. Moreover, Einstein emphasizes that it is true that science, to the extent of its grasp of causative connections, may reach important conclusions as to the compatibility and incompatibility of goals and
evaluations. But he says: “The independent and fundamental definitions regarding goals and values remain beyond science’s reach.”1 Jaspers has also equally echoed this point when he states that while science confines itself to particular object; philosophy deals with the whole of being that transcends the limit of scientific knowledge.

Another significance of Jaspers’ philosophy lies in its attempt to bridge the gap between philosophy and science. Jaspers clearly says that there are many things that both can learn from each other, science provides the content or raw material, while philosophy reflects or decodes whatever has been supplied by science. So, both complement each other; philosophy is empty without science, and science is blind without philosophy. In this connection, philosophy may be seen as the foundation of science. This is the reason why Jaspers says: “Anyone who philosophizes must be familiar with scientific method.”2

However, Jaspers does not agree with those who regard philosophy as the handmaiden of science and those who dub science as too much involved in materialism. How much successful he is in filling the vacuum between philosophy and science, still remains to be seen. Whatever the case may be, we can say that Jaspers succeeds at least in suggesting the possibility of reconciliation between these two disciplines.

Jaspers also analyses the relationship between philosophy and religion. He points out that both have a similar purpose; to look for man’s primal source or Being. They, nevertheless, are apart with regard to the way in which they are searching for the truth. Religion is too much occupied

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2 See Karl Jaspers, Way to wisdom, p. 159
with cult, rite and rituals and becomes organized institution, while philosophy has no cult or rituals. Religion tends to monopolize the truth, which results in dogmatism and fanaticism, whereas philosophy never claims to possess the eternal truth. Religious faith may lead to conflicts and violence, while philosophical faith results in tolerance and open mindedness.

However, philosophy is relevant to religion in that it extends the scope of its vision from the particular religion to accept the truth of other religions; it creates the atmosphere of mutual understanding among different faiths, while religion may become dogmatic. The role of religion highlighted by Jaspers, in our view, still holds true even today. For we can see that every religion has attempted to exert its own view upon the other, claiming that it is far better and represents only true God. This sometimes leads to communal riot and violence, people get killed or tortured in the name of religion, which have left us wonder why there should be religion at all if it brings more harm than good.

However, while looking deeply at the tenet of every religion, it is found that all religions are looking for peace, for harmony of mankind. Then the real culprits must lie down somewhere, that is, religion has been misused. Thus, Jaspers’ philosophy is neither anti-scientific nor anti-religious, since it has made an attempt to integrate philosophy with science and religion. This can be judged from his concept of Encompassing.

With regard to temporality and historicity, Jaspers argues that man is always conditioned by time and situation. Yet, time for him is not something that can be described or measured in the objective manner. That is to say, it is not time in the physical, psychological, or historical sense that
Jaspers is concerned with; rather he lays a stress on a dimension of time in which man gets himself involved, which he calls 'existential time.' In this sense, time and man's being are merged with one another. The modes of time that have been normally typified, as past, present and future, are not completely cut off from each other. At this point, Buddha also expresses the same thing.3

With respect to historicity, Jaspers asserts that man is bound to situations such as time, tradition and culture. Yet, he can transcend them through the act of his decision. It is different from history, which means merely a record of past events. It is true that history is indispensable factor in shaping human condition; the past event conditions the present situation. Yet, through a sense of historicity one can relate the past and future to the present moment, which is open for further possibilities.

In this connection, Jaspers brings out the concept of boundary situations, which consists of situation as such, death, suffering, struggle and guilt. We find that Jaspers' concept of boundary situations comes close to the Buddhist doctrine of the Four Noble Truths, namely, suffering, desire, freedom and the way to freedom.4 For Jaspers, these situations are called boundary or ultimate, because they are all necessary conditions that nobody can escape. Yet, he makes it clear that these situations are the profound sources of philosophising, even though one may not be able to change them. Thus, Jaspers advises us to creat appropriate approach that he calls 'existential' in order that they can lead us to the primal source of our Being.

3 See above, p. 165  
4 See above, p. 142
Such conditions as temporality, historicity and boundary situations mentioned above, seem to reduce man to mere ordinary being. To guard against such misunderstanding Jaspers states that these conditions do not represent the whole picture of Existenz. As a result, he mentions freedom and transcendence as special conditions reserved only for man. By ‘freedom’ Jaspers means ‘existential freedom’ which is quite different from political or social freedom. The former is to be realised individually, whereas the latter is to be acquired and can be empirically justified.

Though Jaspers emphasises that freedom is the essence of man as it is obvious that everybody can say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to whatever comes to his life, he states that freedom is not absolute, since it is to be realised in situation, and it is possible through Transcendence (God). It may be remarked here that Jaspers’ notion of Transcendence, in our view, is not needed as far as the concept of freedom is concerned, since we feel that freedom is possible even without referring to God.

Looking into Jaspers’ concept of philosophy on the whole, we can say that what Jaspers intends to convey in his philosophy is not to give us a ready-made or definite path, but rather to stimulate us to contemplate on our situation. He simply says that philosophy is aimed at illuminating man’s immense potentialities. He believes that the individual can exercise his freedom in choosing any course of action. The ready-made formulas may fail in the unique and complex situations.

Though Jaspers’ philosophy may not provide us ready-made solutions, it helps making us aware of our limits as well as possibilities, which may catapult us to the authentic meaning of life. Thus, the essence
and objective of Jaspers’ philosophy can be summed up in William Earle’s words:

The intent of Jaspers’ philosophizing is simply to call us to our authentic situation. This recall is not itself a doctrine; it is only the stimulus to an inward action each must perform for himself in communication with others. Jaspers’ philosophizing is thus an attempt to consider and enact human honesty; it is philosophy, not as wisdom, but as the love of wisdom.  

Let us now have a reflection on Early Buddhism as a whole. It has been pointed earlier that Buddha develops his philosophy in the midst of numerous thoughts or theories prevailing at that time, particularly idealism of the Upaniṣads and materialism of the Cārvākas. The first one leads to asceticism and the second hedonism. For this reason, Buddha rejects these two extreme views and presents his view or teaching (dhamma) in a new dimension, which is known as the middle way.

However, the word ‘middle’ implies two questions: (a) what is the truth of existence?, (b) what should we do in order to know the truth? The first question comes under the purview of ontology, whereas the second deals with ethics. The answer to these questions can be gathered from the main teachings of Buddha like the doctrines of Dependent Origination (Paticca-samuppāda), the Four Noble Truths (Ariya-saccas), and the Selflessness (Anatta). As to what is the truth of existence, Buddha points out that all beings are subject to change, suffering and without a permanent substance. Based on this thesis, Buddha analyses human existence in

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5 Earle, William, Introduction in “Reason and Existen,” p. 15
different dimensions like five *khandhas*, twelve *āyatanas* and eighteen *dhātus*, all of which are dependent on each other as cause and condition. As such, the truth of existence is temporal and non-substantial. In this context, the Buddha’s presentation of the truth of existence is called ‘the middle way’ (*majjhena-dhamma*), because it goes in the midst of two theories as mentioned above.

The significance of the Buddhist philosophy consists in awakening us to realize the fact that nothing in the world is permanent as existence is temporal and changing; man is always confronted with these limitations. In this situation, what we can do is only to comprehend it, for it is not possible to change it. Those who do not accept this truth will end up in frustration and suffering. Yet, the Buddhist also holds that suffering cannot arise without cause and condition. This implies that if cause and condition were removed, then suffering also would be eliminated. For this reason, Buddha has suggested the way that leads to the cessation of suffering, which is known as the noble eightfold path. It is also called ‘the middle way’ (*majjimā-paṭipadā*) as it is to be distinguished from the extreme views of asceticism and hedonism.

For this reason, we can say that Buddhism is integrative of both religion and philosophy. Though there was no science in the present context at the time of Buddha, we can also say that Buddha is not against science. The reason for this argument is that Buddha acknowledges the significance of external objects, which are perceived through our sense organs. In other words, sense organs provide the raw materials that need to be digested by reflective thinking in order to realize the Ultimate Truth (*Nibbāna*). Without the supply of external objects, the realization of Truth is not possible at all.
With respect to the concept of temporality, Buddhism provides us a practical outlook by explaining the reality of time in terms of conventional as well as transcendental levels. Buddha is not interested in existence of time as such as it would involve the metaphysical speculation. He emphasizes the reality of time in terms of ‘here’ and ‘now’. As a result, one should concentrate on what one is doing, and accomplish one’s own work in time.

Moreover, the other contribution of Buddhism lies in its emphasis on the significance of action (kamma). It is one of the most popular doctrines in Buddhism, and yet is the most complicated too. Buddha always stresses that the individual is characterized as good, noble or bad not because of castes or birth, but through actions. If we keep this doctrine in mind, there would be no discrimination on the grounds of racism or castes.

However, the most significant aspect of Buddhism can be seen from its doctrine of Freedom (Nibbāna) and Noble Eightfold Path (Atthaṅgikamagga), since it confirms that the Ultimate Goal, i.e. the cessation of suffering, is within the reach of man. Yet, at the same time it also shows that such goal could be achieved through one’s own efforts, not through the blessing of God. This can be applied in our day-to-day life too. For example, when we want to reach a certain goal, we should make an attempt to achieve it with our own capacity instead of looking outside for help.

Now, we have reached the last leg of the comparative study of Jaspers’ philosophy and Early Buddhism on human condition and temporality. Though both philosophies differ in their modes of approach to the problems of human condition, they exhibit some common features with regard to their form. As T.R.V. Murti, the eminent philosopher, observes:
The centre of the circle may be reached from the periphery by any of the possible radii; short of reaching the very centre. Persons adopting different radii may feel that they are on the right path to the centre and that the others are not. For each votary may see the centre looming ahead of him, but he cannot, from the nature of his predicament, see that others may also be reaching the center through their particular modes of approach. 6

This observation is indeed quite true. The center or the goal is the same for all the truth-seekers, only the approach to the goal is different. The truth in both the philosophies is essentially the same, that is, both accept temporality, suffering, freedom and transcendence as the constitution of man. Truth is attained by going beyond the temporal realm. But the world of common experience is not unreal for both Jaspers and Buddha. Both of them want to know the reality of man and the world and looks for their primal source. However, they become different with reference to their position on the nature of ultimate reality and how to know it.

Mankind today is in major phase of transition, as significant as the earlier ones along with dramatic progress in many fields. Globalization and information technology have demolished all known barriers of time and space. It is now quite clear that we are on the threshold of major change. Whether it is in the field of politics or economics, communication or culture, the powerful new globalization is developing. Although we have advanced in credit by in science and technology, yet we have been fighting violence, greedy, envious, muddled with fear and burdened with great sorrow.

The world today lives in constant fear, suspicion and tension. Science has produced weapons that are capable of mass destruction. Religion becomes the institution that propagates hatred and conflict rather than love and mutual understanding. Human beings, in fear of the situation they have created, are looking for security. The United Nations, for example, is established to promote, preserve and guarantee the world peace. But what is happening to the world today? Do we really have peace and feel secure more than people in the past? On the contrary, we are threatened with sophisticated weapons, with the dread terrorism. We have failed to achieve a sustainable peace. The psychosocial evolution coupled with materialism, and our living in the sensual world have led us to a crisis of civilization and culture. In this paradoxical situation, what is needed is a deep exploration into the basis of our consciousness.

Either mankind learns to end individual and collective violence, brutality, acquisition, fear, anger and other psychological imbalance, or the face the challenge of social extinction. There is no other option. We die together, or we live together, we have to choose between Buddha (the way of peace-Middle Path) and Bomb (Self-annihilation or Self-destruction). What is the goal of human life? A Buddhist answer is: To achieve the Bliss. How to achieve the Bliss? By attaining the freedom. What is the freedom? It is the freedom of mind. How does the freedom arise? It arises as soon as the bondage is removed. The bondage refers to the fetters of the human being, which lead to the suffering in the world life. The Buddha prescribes a way tending to the proper livelihood (samma-ājīva).

The Bliss known as Nibbāna (Nirvāṇa Skt.), etymologically suggests a state of extinguishing the burning flame caused by the suffering. The proper analogy in the Pali text speaks thus: The burning flame of a lamp
extinguishes as and when the wick burns off, after the consuming fuel. The burning like suffering ends as and when wicks like ignorance burns off. Fuel like psychic impressions (samiskāra) of the mind are being powered again and again by performing deeds by the individual, which lead to generate continuity.

The Buddhist way of life is only remedy of social evils. It stands upon the quantum of accumulated deeds performed by an individual for the cause of his fellow beings or society. These deeds may be of three types, (i) Occasional or Casual Performance (ii) Continuous Performance (iii) Indifferent in performing good or bad deeds. The devout Buddhist always prefers the second one as the Master did till his Mahāparinirvāṇa. Such practice with a vow to dedicate one’s own life for the cause of other beings who are under the stream of suffering is known as Bodhicaryā.

A Buddhist righty thus justifies this standpoint by declaring that the goal of human life is to attain the Bliss as a Bodhisattva gains by dedicating his own Self for the good and welfare of beings. Such approach is observed since the beginning of the Buddhist order when Buddha instructs his disciples, “Brethrens, you move by twos for the good and welfare of the many, with compassionate mind for all around in the divine ones”.

From the above discussion, it follows that the philosophies of Jaspers and Buddha show the way out of the contemporary crisis born of scientism and dogmatic religion. This is obvious from what Jaspers says on “the loving struggle” wherein Existenz extends love and care to all human beings.

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7 Caratha bhikkhave carikam bahuponmatisya bahuponmassukhāya lokānākampiyā hitiyā sukhiyā ca devamanussānaṃ.
The authentic communication with others strengthens human solidarity based on love and understanding.

It appears that Jaspers is giving more emphasis on historicity. The realization of God does not dissolve the temporal world. He accepts the world with its pluralities. For Buddha, on the other hand, the world does not have ontic significance. But the concept of Buddisattva reveals that Buddhism also does not take quietist attitude. The Boddhisattva is not satisfied only with his own salvation but also works for the salvation of others with his loving kindness and compassion.

The relevance of the philosophies of Jaspers and Buddha lies in helping us to go deeper into the existential problems faced by the individual. They have shown that the only way to be free from the temporal bonds is through the quest of the spiritual realm. It has been shown in the present work that the step towards transcendence is to be taken through temporality. The suffering caused by the temporal bonds shows the way to transcendence. As transcendence is not a theoretical, metaphysical construct, it can be realized only at the backdrop of temporality only.

At the temporal level, the existential tension is felt and the result is suffering. It makes man feel the trauma of his existential choice. It is not only the unfulfilment of desires but also even the fulfillment of desires eventually lead to the dissatisfaction and suffering. This existential situation is inevitable if one remains under the influence of saṁsāra as exposed by Buddha. The only way to get rid of this trauma is to transcend the historicity of one’s own being. The aspiration to go beyond is in the very constitution of man, whether it takes one life to realize as understood by Jaspers, or it may take the cycle of birth and rebirth as disclosed by Buddha.
Temporal happenings present an opportunity in which transcendence takes place. The avalanche at the sea gives one the courage to face it. One can become either as an object of the historical forces or as an onlooker of them. In the case of the former, one becomes a victim to the things around, and in the latter case one is their master. To become a master is to get liberated. The psycho-physical identity of ego is the very basis of suffering and which ties one to the chain of historicity. One can waste life after life in this very process. But just a moment of dropping this psych-physical identity transforms man completely, and he is no more a part of the process.

Buddha has given the definite path to enter the spiritual realm without bringing the idea of God. Jaspers, no doubt has not prescribed any such definite path. He wants man to seek his own path. For him, freedom is to be realized in confrontation with God. Nevertheless, the starting point of Jaspers is the individual (Existenz) and not God. Like Buddha, Jaspers believes that the individual has to seek the light himself, it is not bestowed on him through Grace. Both of them come close to each other in holding the view “be a lamp unto thyself (ātma dipabhava).” They maintain that spiritual realization is not possible though discursive reasoning but through insight.

The existential illumination shown by Jaspers and Buddha is the key to all the problems of human existence both at the personal and social levels. This is the message given by the great visionaries of the East and the West. They have shown us that the perennial vision of human situation is not tied to the boundaries of the East and the West. No wonder, both Jaspers and Buddha ultimately reach almost the same kind of illumination though in different ways. They are in this sense “eternal contemporaries” as mentioned earlier. The perennial vision given by these two great thinkers rides over
history illuminating the whole mankind. Their message of humanism based on human values of non-violence, love and compassion play a very significant role in the contemporary scenario of turmoil.

Considering this work as a whole, we realize that it deals with a vast topic that requires in-depth study, which again needs more insight and comprehensive understanding of both Jaspers' philosophy and Early Buddhism. It cannot claim to be a comprehensive work. Yet, it is hoped that this work would at least be served as starting point for further study, particularly with regard to the comparative study of Buddhism and Existentialism. It is also hoped that this work would be able to shed light on the significance of both philosophies in their attempts to help us understand the authentic human condition.