ABSTRACT

The procedure followed in this research will first consider the thoughts of Gautama Buddha and then those of St. John of the Cross. One of the reasons for allotting the Buddha the first place in our considerations is his chronological precedence.

The first chapter makes a survey of the life and works of these two spiritual masters. After considering the Socio-Cultural Milieu into which Gautama was born, his early life, the four sights that influenced him very much, his search, his enlightenment and the preaching and the formation of the Sangha that followed, an attempt is made to synthesize his teachings, the rising of Buddhist schools and scriptures and the spread of Buddhism far and wide. Similarly St. John of the Cross – his early life and education, his association with St. Teresa of Avila – another Spanish mystic, his personality and character, the various factors that influenced him, his writings and the essence of his teaching.

The second chapter attempts first a presentation of Gautama’s approach to, and ideas of, human beings and their main characteristics. Suffering sounds an important note in Gautama’s understanding of the human reality. His main concern was suffering humanity and the way to liberation from suffering. Therefore I have tried to obtain an in-depth understanding of the full meaning and range of suffering for Gautama Buddha. The Pāli word for suffering is dukkha. In this section therefore, I have dealt with dukkha and its causes as well as effects and
tried to investigate into various aspects related to it - Cause of Dukkha, Pratītyasamutpāda, Skhandas, Anicca, Anatta, Śūnyatā and Karma Samsara.

The human condition for Friar John is no doubt very similar in general to that seen by the Buddha: birth, growth, the ups and downs of life, death. One important factor that threw light on these misfortunes and their not so negative meaning was his social environment which was permeated with faith in the Bible. Prayer and reflection on the sufferings of Jesus Christ gave new significance in his eyes, to the human situation. Hence I have dealt with the Human Composite, Permanence and Impermanence, Spirits, Emptiness (Nada and Sunya) and Merit and Demerit.

In the third chapter I have dealt with human destiny or the goal of human existence according to the two great sages.

The goal of life for Gautama Buddha must necessarily be of the nature of painlessness. This goal of ultimate repose is termed as nirvana. Therefore in this section I have tried to deal in detail with Nirvana in different Buddhist traditions and its various aspects, the notion of divinity in Buddhism and also the progressive posthumous elevation of the Buddha.

For John of the Cross, the goal of every human being is Union with God. This supernatural union is the objective of all his strivings and also the chief aim of all his writings. This section proceeds describing the various aspects of union, Union of the Intellect through Faith, Union of the Memory through Hope, Union of the Will through Love, Substantial Union and Contemplation.
The means and method employed by the Buddha to arrive at the goal i.e. nirvana is the Astangamarga or the Eightfold Path contained in the Arya Satyas or the Four Noble Truths. Hence, the fourth chapter deals with the Four Noble Truths:

1. There is suffering – Dukkha
2. Every suffering has a cause – Dukkha-Samudaya
3. The Cessation of Suffering – Dukkha Nirodha
4. The Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering – Dukkha-Nirodha-Marga
   1) Right Understanding
   2) Right Thought
   3) Right Speech
   4) Right Action
   5) Right Livelihood
   6) Right Effort
   7) Right Mindfulness
   8) Right Concentration

Under concentration or Samādhi, are also dealt Meditation, Ānāpānasati and Vipassanā. After that I have dealt with the parallels of all these in John of the Cross.

The final chapter by way of conclusion is devoted to summarize their message, their approach to religion and their recommendations to attain peace of soul.