

# A Discussion on Nirvana as Described In the Teachings of Gautam Buddha

Anamica Dubey

Research Scholar, MGGC Vishwavidyalaya, Chitrakoot, Madhya Pradesh India

The religion is a social ideal which objective is to build the society of human beings to be regular and peaceful. The Buddha was the teacher or advisor of people of society in that time and furthermore, he instructed the people being a good subject of the country. The Buddhist religious thought is brought to study in the Tripitaka. It is used as the primary source for searching Buddha's religious and spiritual thought. The concept of Nirvana is more than 2500 years old. Throughout the centuries various scholars and philosophers tried to explain this concept using their limited knowledge. In fact the concept of Nirvana is much more-wide and difficult to explain in mundane terms. The concept of Nirvana was originally explained by the Lord Buddha (566 - 486 B.C.). His lordship reached Enlightenment, at the age of 35, awakening to the true nature of reality, which is Nirvana (Absolute Truth)? The word Nirvana comes from the root meaning 'to blow out' and refers to the extinguishing of the fires of greed, hatred and delusion. When these emotional and psychological defilements are destroyed by wisdom, the mind becomes free, radiant and joyful and at death one is no longer subject to rebirth. "Nirvana is the ultimate happiness. Nirvana can only be explained to the 'unenlightened' by negation.<sup>1</sup> Thus the Buddha tries to explain this deep concept to one of his disciples. He asks whether the fire, when it is extinguished, can be said to have gone north, south, east, or west. Nirvana, however, cannot be described as existing, not existing, both existing and not, or neither existing nor not.

**Keywords :** Gautam Buddha, Enlightenment, Joyful, Unenlightened

The two cooperative approaches are known as analytic meditation and fixed meditation, respectively. Tibetan Buddhist meditation may take place by finding a calm, quiet location and then allowing the mind to enter a similar state free of distractions. We all know what happens when a fire goes out. The flames die down and the fire is gone for good. So when we first learn that the name for the goal of Buddhist practice, nibbana (nirvana), literally means the extinguishing of a fire, it's hard to imagine a deadlier image for a spiritual goal: utter annihilation. It turns out, though, that this reading of the concept is a mistake in translation, not so much of a word as of an image. What did an extinguished fire represent to the Indians of the Buddha's day? anything but annihilation. However, when teaching his own

disciples, the Buddha used nibbana more as an image of freedom. Apparently, all Indians at the time saw burning fire as agitated, dependent, and trapped, both clinging and being stuck to its fuel as it burned. To ignite a fire, one had to "seize" . it.<sup>2</sup> When fire let go of its fuel, it was "freed," released from its agitation, dependence, and entrapment - calm and unconfined. This is why Pali poetry repeatedly uses the image of extinguished fire as a metaphor for freedom. In fact, this metaphor is part of a pattern of fire imagery that involves two other related terms as well. Upadana, or clinging, also refers to the sustenance a fire takes from its fuel. Khandha means not only one of the five "heaps" (form, feeling, perception, thought processes, and consciousness) that define all conditioned experience, but also the trunk of a tree.

Just as fire goes out when it stops clinging and taking sustenance from wood, so the mind is freed when it stops clinging to the khandhas.

In Sanskrit the word Nirvana can mean the following: cessation, extinction (of suffering), extinguished, quited, and calmed. In the West nirvana is also known as "Awakening" or "Enlightenment". In Buddhism it is generally believed that anybody who has achieved nirvana (also known as bodhi) is in fact a Buddha. The state of Nirvana is beyond our five senses, beyond mind, beyond words. It cannot be expressed because it is pure consciousness, only bliss, it is Nirvana.<sup>3</sup> This bliss or beatitude is unending, unlimited and unceasing. Mortals understand existence with reference to their individual life, location, etc. But Nirvana cannot be understood the way we understand ordinary existence. Nirvana is the stateless state. What's beyond word, beyond meaning, beyond the mind and intellect's limits is Nirvana.

The word Nirvana belongs to the Jain/Buddhist (shraman) tradition. Since this concept is totally Indian, it is better to discuss it from an Indian point of view. In the Indian context it is well to remember that we have the Jain, Vedic and Buddhist theosophies converging like three holy rivers.<sup>4</sup> To consider one of these as the main philosophy of India would not be right-not right because even though each of these philosophies is independent, yet there is an overlap or a sharing of similar principles.

Just as a lamp is no more when it is out similarly when you lose Aatma you attain Moksha. The summary above shows that the Vedic philosophy has many different views of Moksha. Scholars feel that some Vedic sects were influenced by Jain and Buddhist (Shraman) philosophy.<sup>5</sup> The Jains are divided into the Digambar and the Shwetambar. Each has a different way to upasana and their spiritual leaders are different. Yet both accept that Nirvana is the ultimate aim of existence. Their

concept of Nirvana is the same. After studying the Jain, Buddhist and Vedic views to attain Nirvana one can only affirm that sadhana is the sole way to Nirvana.<sup>6</sup> Sadhana is only way to exist. The three cultures endorse sadhana to be utmost importance. This collective endorsement gives India its cultural harmony. While you are alive you have your future before you. But in Nirvana, there is no anxiety or desire for the future. Complete deliverance from the Karmas, and attainment of total consciousness is Nirvana.<sup>7</sup>

Thus a person can discuss and think over the importance of the Nirvana. Here we see that in the teachings related to existence of soul and attainment of salvation Lord Buddha clarifies the importance of the Nirvana and declares that it is the state that every soul, confined within a physical body, yearns to reach. Karma—a person's accumulated actions while alive—determines the soul's sojourn through the unceasing cycle of birth and death. How does the soul break free to its natural destination? There are three ways to nirvana. The path of knowledge is exacting, requiring tremendous intellectual acumen and rigorous spiritual practices. Right action is a second way, but few people can exert lifelong self-control and the disciplining of the ego, essential to cancel out (their negative actions, offers the simplest way to nirvana, one that can be practiced by virtually everyone.

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