



THE CONCEPT OF LIBERATION IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEMS

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Abstract: In Indian philosophy, bondage means the liability of individual to birth and all consequent sufferings while as liberation means complete cessation of sufferings. Perhaps the biggest idea in man's search of happiness is the concept of liberation. Human beings always struggle for their existence like all other conscious beings. However, while the lower beings always struggle more or less blindly without any conscious plan and purpose and motivated by instinct, whereas man uses the superior gift of his intellect to understand the conditions and meaning of the struggle and the device plans and instruments to ensure success in his life. He wishes to lead his life in the light of his knowledge of himself and the world. The present study represents an attempt to identify the desirable and necessary approach and gives a detailed concept of liberation.

Key words: liberation, sufferings, citta world.

The end of the life is within the life. The soul of man is free from worldly sufferings. It is through the non-discrimination between the soul and the body or ego that the sufferings and turmoil affecting the ego are wrongly supposed to have affected the soul. A man of realization becomes free, one who lokes it is entangled in the world.¹ Indian philosophical systems have been divided into two classes namely, the āstika and the nāstika. The nāstika views are those, which neither regard the Vedas as infallible nor try to establish their own validity on their authority. These principles are three in number namely Cārvāka, Jains and the Buddhist. The āstika or orthodox schools are six in number namely; Nyāya Vaiśeṣika Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta, generally known as six systems (saddarsana). In these philosophical systems, each system has given their concepts about the attainment of Liberation. In the following pages, we will consider the view of the Indian philosophical schools on the concept of liberation. First as regards the Veda and Upanishads, liberation is the result of knowledge (jñāna). By real knowledge one gets liberation. This knowledge is obtained through immediate experience. It is beyond intellectual knowledge. It is determined by space, time or causality. It is the field of higher knowledge through identity. The knowledge of Brahman

implies being Brahman. This is to see Brahman everywhere and to one self in all. Veda and Upanishads had theoretically discussed the nature of liberation and they have discovered means to achieve it.

In fact, the Upanishads do not make absolute distinctions between knowledge and activity, philosophy and life. To acquire the knowledge of Brahman is to become Brahman. Veda and Upanishads have discussed in detail the means to achieve liberation. This includes the ethics of the Veda and Upanishads because liberation is the ultimate end sought by them and self-realization is the only means to liberation. According to Upanishads the knower of atman crosses all sorrow, ‘Tarati Sokam atmavit’. It is true that Upanishads has much laid stress on knowledge (Jñāna) as the means to Liberation. “Brachmavid Brahmaiva bhavati”, the knower of Brahman, becomes indeed Brahman.

According to Brahdyaranyaka Upanishads the control of the mind on the body and the catharsis of the citta through yoga, make one suitable for Brahman-realization. Penance is helpful in the catharsis of the Citta, Sama, Dama, Uprarati, Titiksa and Samādhi are necessary for self-realization. One should practice this six-fold yoga of prāṇāyāma, prātyāhara, dhāraṇa, dhyāna and samādhi. As in Upanishads, self-realization is the ultimate end, because self is the real essences of man. Self is all and self is Brahman. Brahman is a real essence of man, but man forgets this real essence due to avidya. This avidya is in the nature of world. It is beginningless to remove this avidya by sustained efforts and by achievement of knowledge. It is only by the achievement of knowledge that one gets liberation and freedom from all miseries.

Indian philosophical systems accept the four ends of human activity (purusartha) namely (Dharma)-virtue (artha)-wealth, (Kama)-enjoyment and (Moksa) or liberation. Cārvāka also known as Lokayata come to materialistic conception of liberation, of these four purusartha, they rejects artha and Moksa. According to this school of thought, liberation in sense of destruction of all sufferings can be obtained only by death and no wise man would willingly work for that end. Virtue and vice are distinction made by the scriptures whose authority cannot be rationally accepted. Therefore, neither liberation nor virtue should be our end. Wealth and enjoyment are the only rational ends that a wise man can toil to achieve. Enjoyment is the ultimate end, Wealth is not an end in itself; it is good only as a means to enjoyment. According to them, if liberation is freedom of soul from its bondage to physical existence, it is absurd because there is no soul, but even if liberation means the attainment of a state free from all pain, in the very life, it is also an impossible ideal. Liberation is the sense of complete cessation of sufferings can only mean death. “Maranam eva apavargah”² Existence in the body is bound up with pleasure as well as pain, we can only try to minimize pain and enjoy as much pleasure as we can. They considered pleasure as the highest goal (summum bonum) of Life. Thus, Cārvāka says that the goal of human life is therefore to attain maximum amount of pleasure in this life, avoiding pain as far as possible. If we remember that our existence is confined to the existence of the body and to this life, we must regard the pleasure arising in the body as the good thing, we can obtain. We should not throw away the opportunities of enjoying this life in the futile hope of enjoyment here-after, ‘Rather a pigeon today than a peacock tomorrow’. ‘A Sure shell (Courie) is better than a doubtful golden coin’. Who is that fool who would entrust the money in hand to the custody of other’s.³

In Jaina philosophical system, the escape of jiva from matter is liberation, Karma is the link which unites the soul to the body. Ignorance of truth and four passions anger (krodha), greed (lobha), pride (mana) and delusion (maya) which are called Kasaya or sticky substances where karmic particles stick attract the flow of karmic matter towards the soul to bind it is called Asrava or flow. The state, when these particles actually infiltrate into the soul and bind, it is called bandha or bondage. In bondage, the karmic matter unites with the soul by intimate interpenetration, just as water unites with milk or fire unites with the red-hot iron ball. It is for this reason that we find life and consciousness in every part of the body. By the possession and practice of right faith, knowledge and conduct the influx of fresh karma is stopped. This state is called Samvara or stoppage of karmas. Then, the already existing karma must be exhausted; this state is called Nirjara or wearing out. When the last particle of karma has been exhausted, the partnership between soul and matter is dissolved and the soul shines in its intrinsic nature of infinite faith, infinite knowledge, bliss and infinite power. This state is called liberation. The liberated soul transcends Samsara and goes straight to siddha-shila at the top of the world, and dwells there in eternal knowledge and bliss. Bondage, therefore means union of the soul with matter and consequently liberation means separation of matter from the soul. We conscious living souls find ourselves bound to karma matter and the end of our life is to remove this karmic dross and region our intrinsic nature. Hence, Jainism is primarily an ethical teaching and its aim is the perfection of the soul. Asrava or the flow of matter towards the soul is the cause of liberation, everything else in Jainism is said to be the elaboration of this fundamental teaching.

Nirvāna, the word for liberation in Buddhism, is known as the ultimate end of Buddha's philosophy. Nirvāna means extinction of the self. It also means the extinguishing of fires of passion. In it, the fires of avarice jealousy, anger and doubt are extinguished and impurities of the mind like sexual, ignorant and effective tendencies are vanquished. It affects the end of the cycle of re-birth. Nirvāna has been said to be or described as a state of calm or equanimity in which passions and the sorrows accruing from it are completely calmed. It is neither the destruction of existence nor inactivity. Nirvāna can be attained in this life by a human being. Nirvāna is only the destruction of the fires of lust, hatred and ignorance. Sometimes a distinction is drawn between two kinds of nirvāna i.e. Upadhisesa and Anupadhisesa.

- (i) Upadhisesa: where the only human passions are extinct and
- (ii) Anupadhisesa: where all being is extinct.

Whenever it is said that people who attain nirvāna in this world, the Upadhisesa nirvāna is meant. It is the arhatship that becomes pari-nirvāna when the arhat disappears from the world of the transitory. The distinction of Upadhisesa and Anupadhisesa, thus corresponds to that between nirvāna and pari-nirvāna, dying out and complete dying out⁴. There is no strict usage on this question⁵. Even Pari-nirvāna cannot mean absolute non-being. It only means absolute perfection of being, "Final deliverance is declared by the sage Buddha to be nothing other than a flow of faultless states of consciousness."⁶ It is mental response free from stress and conflict. The suppression of the evil tendencies is accompanied by a simultaneous spiritual

progress. Nirvāna, which is the consummation of the spiritual struggle, is a positive blessedness. It is the goal of perfection and not the abyss of annihilation.

It is said that in nirvāna, which is compared to deep sleep, the soul loses its individuality and lapses into the objective whole. Nirvāna is neither annihilation nor existence as we conceive it, but is becoming one with the eternal reality, which Buddha does not explicitly admit only because it is beyond the horizon of human thought. We are obliged to employ negative terms to describe it. It is a condition transcending subject-object relations. In it, there is no trace of self-consciousness. It is a state of activity which is not subject to causality, for it is unconditioned freedom.⁷ It is identified with positive bliss. It is said to be the highest of the indestructible state... “Nibbanam Padam archutam-Suttanipata vijanasutta”. It is fearless goal.⁸ “Nibbanam akutobhayam” It gives happiness here and here after, “ihaṇandati Pechchanandati”⁹. It is highest bliss. “Nibbanam Paramam Sukham”¹⁰.

We are even told that to mistake nirvāna as annihilation is a wicked heresy.¹¹ This repudiates the view of Rhys Davids, Olden Berg and Paul Dahlke and earlier view of Mr's Rhys Davids that “Nirvāna of Buddhism is simply extinction”. Older Berg inclines to a negative view¹² Dahlke frequently suggest it. In one place he writes; only in Buddhism does the conception freedom from pain remain purely a negative thing and not a positive in disguise-heavenly bliss.”¹³ According to these writer's nirvāna is the night of nothingness; the darkness where all light is extinguished. Such a one-sided reading of Buddha's Theory is not new. Buddha, after having declared that the condition of the liberated one is in conceivable, continues; “Teaching this, explaining this, I am falsely, without reason, wrongly not, truthfully accused by. Some an unbeliever is the Samana Gotama, the real entity's destruction, annihilation, dying away is what he preaches'. What I am not, what is not my doctrine that I am accused of.”¹⁴ Strange to say, there are other who look up on the Buddhist nirvāna as so positively pleasurable that they charge Buddha with hedonism. Evidently, two different views were developed very early on the basis of Buddha's utterances. Buddha's real attitude is probably, that nirvāna is a state of perfection inconceivable by us, and if we are obliged to offer descriptions of it. It is best to bring out its inconceivability by negative descriptions, its richness of content by positive predicates, realizing all the time that such descriptions are at best approximations only. Buddhas last words to his disciples were, ‘Be Ye Lamps unto your selves, be ye a refuge to yourselves'. Be take yourselves to no external refuge. Hold fast to the truth as a lamp. Hold fast as a refuge to the truth and work-out your own salvation”.¹⁵

According to Nyāya-Vaiśesika thinkers, release is freedom from pain. This condition of immorality, free from fear imperishable, consisting in the attainment of bliss is called Brahman”, “Tad abhayam, ajaram, amṛtyupadam brahmoksemapraptih.”¹⁶ Liberation is supreme felicity marked by perfect tranquility and freedom from defilement. It is not the destruction of self, but only of bondage. Uddyotakara urges that, if the released soul is to have everlasting pleasure, It must also have an everlasting body. Since experiencing is not possible without the bodily mechanism.¹⁷ When the spiritual text speak of the essence of the soul as pleasure, they mean only perfect freedom from pain.¹⁸ The Naiyayika proves that every idea of liberation includes this minimum of freedom from pain. Liberation in the Nyāya-Vaiśesika is complete cessation of

effort, activity, consciousness and absolute cessation of the soul from body, manas etc. This state of pure existence to which the liberated souls attain is compared to the state of deep dreamless sleep.¹⁹ This state of abstract existence without knowledge and joy is however, said to be one of great glory, as the soul possesses the general qualities of Vibhutva or ubiquity, though not the specific ones (Visesaguna) of knowledge, desire and well.

As per Nyāyakās, the ultimate end of human life is the attainment of Mukti, to get rid of all types of sorrows or sufferings. In the Nyāya-Vaiśesika philosophy, they have used the word Mukti for liberation. This is especially true of the Nyāya-Vaiśesikas system, which purposes at the very outset, to give us knowledge of reality or realities for the realization of the highest good or the summum bonum of our life. The different systems however, give us different description of this consummate state of the soul's existence. For the Nyāyakās, Apavarga or liberation is absolute freedom from pain. This implies that it is a state in which the soul is released from all bonds and its connections with the body and the senses. So long as the soul is conjoined with a body, it is impossible for it to attain the state of utter freedom from pain. The body with the sense organs being there, we cannot possibly prevent this contact with undesirable and unpleasant object and so must submit to the inevitable experiences of painful feelings. Hence, in liberation, the soul must be free from the shackles of the body and the senses. Then thus served from the body, the soul ceases to have not only painful but also pleasurable experiences, may more, it ceases to have any experiences or consciousness. Therefore, in liberation the self exists as a pure substance free from all connection with the body, neither suffering pain, nor enjoying, pleasure, nor having consciousness. Even liberation is the negation of pain, not in the sense of a suspension of it for a longer or shorter period, as in a good sleep or a state of recovery from some bodily or mental affliction. It is absolute freedom from pain for all time to come. It is just the supreme conditions of the soul, which has been variously described in the scriptures as 'freedom from pain' (Abhayam), freedom from decay and change (Ajaram), freedom from death (Amrtyupadam) and so forth.²⁰ Some latter Naiyayikas however, hold that liberation is the souls final deliverance from pain and attainment of eternal bliss.²¹

As per Vaiśesika Philosophy, liberation is a state of felicity that naturally belongs to the self. However, this opinion amounts to the admission of an absurdity, because the self-being ex-hypothesis absolutely devoid of consciousness in the state of liberation, can have no consciousness is lacking in logical propriety. It is perhaps, in view of this difficulty that the Nyāyakas went further than the Vaiśesikas in holding that there is no transcendental felicity in the state of liberation, this state cannot be said to be pleasurable for the simple reason that where there is pleasure, there is desire for pleasure, together with its necessary consequences, namely enslavement or bondage. According to Nyāya philosophers, liberation is absolute freedom from pain. It is the supreme condition of soul described in the scriptures as, 'freedom from fear (Abhayam), freedom from decay and change (Ajaram), freedom from death' (Amrtyupadam) and so forth.²² Some later Nyāyakas however hold that liberation is the souls final deliverance from pain and attainment of eternal bliss.²³ That is the reason why the Nyāyakas not only agreed with the Vaiśesikas in regarding liberation as freedom from suffering, but also differed from them in holding that it is freedom from

happiness as well. In any case, the Nyāyakas and Vaiśeśikas may be said to be advocates of liberation as self-realization in opposition of Buddhism and the Advaita-Vedānta of Śankara, both of which conceive liberation to be a state of self-annihilation. The Sāṃkhya-Yoga agrees with the Nyāya-Vaiśeśika in holding that liberation negatively speaking is freedom from suffering and, positively speaking, consists in the reaffirmation of the individuality, independence and autonomy of the self. In particular, it holds in common with the Nyāya-Vaiśeśikas that liberation thus understood is realizable through the negation of experience. However, it is important to note that Sāṃkhya-Yoga differs from the Nyāya-Vaiśeśikas in the understanding the relation of experience to the self. According to Nyāya-Vaiśeśika, The self is substance, to which the various items of its experience are related as qualities, so that its bondage, which consists in its empirical life, is real. The Sāṃkhya-Yoga on the other hand holds that the self is not the substance, but the subject of its experience and that relation to its experience is illusory, resembling as it does the relation such as that the surface of water to the trees which cast their reflection's upon it. The idea underlying this view is however, that liberation would be realizable goal if bondage were illusory and not real as held by the Nyāya- Vaiśeśika and their allies in this respect.

Moreover, the negation of experience, which according to the Sāṃkhya-Yoga , is the necessary pre-requisite of liberation, should leave the self in a condition in which it is, as in the view of the Nyāya-Vaiśeśika, indistinguishable from material objects. However, Sāṃkhya-Yoga tries to save itself from this obnoxious position by holding that consciousness is the essence of the self (purusa), and that the self, regarded as essentially conscious is in class apart from material objects. But then, the difficulty here is that consciousness in its usual sense is bipolar and indeed is a generic term standing for different kinds of experience and consequently, that the denial of experience to the self cannot leave the self in a state of consciousness. Therefore, in viewing the self in itself and in the state of liberation to be essentially conscious, Sāṃkhya-Yoga construes consciousness in a transcendental sense without offering any justification for taking this step. The only redeeming feature of the Sāṃkhya-Yoga concept of liberation however lies in holding that liberation is a way of self-realization, instead of self-annihilation. Both maintain that liberation can be attained only by knowledge because due to ignorance, the ego, which is not purusa is bounded and the only way out of ignorance is knowledge, the one method of obtaining. Ignorance means the failure to recognize one's own real nature. Not knowing the real nature of the soul, the living being identifies itself with the mind, or the ego and intellect and is affected by their pleasure and suffering itself suffers. When the jiva recognizes or realizes it's real nature, Purusa or atman, it then causes to be influenced by the suffering of the ego, intellect or the mind. In this way, liberation can be attained only by realizing the difference between prakarti and the purusua. The attainment of liberation means just the clear recognition of the self as a reality which is beyond time and space, and above the mind and the body therefore, essentially free, eternal and immortal.²³

The Sāmkhya-Yoga thinkers both believe in Jivan mukti as well as Videhmukti. The Jiva attains freedom when he realizes the truth, even though he may have to continue to live in the body for a short period because of actions accumulated in the past. Just as the wheel continues to revolve for some time due to its prior motion, even after the potter has ceased moving it. In much the same way, the body of the individual being continues to exist for some time after the attainment of liberation because of the past action of the body. However, the liberated self does not experience any relation with body even though residing in it. Thus, no new actions (karmas) are accumulated and earlier ones begin to lose their power but final and complete liberation is attainable only after death and in this there is no relation even with the body, this is videhamukti. In this state complete liberation (Moksha) is attained from all kinds of bodies, subtle and gross, has been obtained. According to Vijnāna bhiksu videhamukti is the only kind of liberation, since the self cannot be completely free from the influence of bodily and mental changes so long as it is embodied.²⁴ As long as the body detains the soul, the latter is only not entirely free from mental and physical distortion. According to the Vedānta liberation is a state of happiness. According to Sāṅkhya, both pain or suffering and pleasure are relative and inseparable. Hence, there is no happiness in the state of liberation. It is above pleasure and suffering. It is beyond all qualities. The Yoga system is the natural complement of practical discipline to achieve the Sāṅkhya ideal of liberation or kaivalya.

It is necessary to this end that we should remind our-selves that neither the founder of Purva-Mimāmsā school of philosophy and the author of Mimāmsā –sutra, which forms the foundation of Mimāmsā philosophy – Jaimini, nor the commentator on the Mimāmsā-Sutra, Sabara gave any importance to the concept of liberation. They gave much importance and stress on the supreme need for the performance of the duties prescribed by the Vedas with a view to the attainment of happiness in heaven. The highest good, according to Mimāmsā philosophers, is the attainment of Heaven or a state in which there is unalloyed bliss. Heaven is regarded as the usual end of rituals.²⁵ The destruction of the three fold bondage imposed upon the self by the world would obviously result in the negation of all kinds of experiences, including cognition, pleasure, pain, desire, aversion, impression, merit and demerit. The inclusion of merit and demerit is however of special significance in this list. The reason for this is that since merit and demerit, if they remain intact, are apt to bring about re-birth, together with a body and its necessary consequence in the shape of bondage. Their destruction would put an end to rebirth and the production of bodies and thereby serve to eliminate the possibility of bondage. Hence, it is evident that the Mimāmsā rules out the possibility of jivan mukti (liberation during life on earth) and advocates the doctrine of videhamukti (liberation after death). It was left for Kumarila and Prabhakara and their respective follower's to deal with question of liberation and the way of its achievement. Now Kumarila beings by observing that liberation in order to be worth the name must be something eternal, but whatever is of a positive nature such as happiness in heaven is perishable. It should then as the holds be of a negative character, and must be due to the destruction of the self's relation to the world which binds it through the body the sense organs and the external object of experience. It is important to note that in this connection that Kumarila is here thinking of the destruction of the self's relation to the world (Prapanca-Sambandhavilaya) and not, as held by the Advaita, Vedānta of Śankara, the destruction or cessation of the empirical world itself (Prapancavilaya).

Both Kumarila and Prabhakara are in agreement with each other in this respect, and the latter, like the former, holds that liberation, consisting in complete freedom from the sufferings of empirical life is consequent upon the destruction of the self's relation with the body. And the sense organs following upon the destruction of the latter due to the disappearance of merits and demerits. And in consonance with this view both of them hold further that the state of liberation is absolutely vacuous being not only devoid of all empirical experiences, including pleasure and pain, but also the so called transcendental consciousness of bliss (ananda) as conceived by the Vedānta. Thus, it is plain that the Mimāmsā, like the Nyāya-Vaiśesika and Sāmkhya-Yoga admits a purely negative conception of liberation.

Śankaracārya, the commentator of Brahman Sutra, has given an elaborate distinction of the nature of liberation. Liberation is the transcendental truth, immutable, eternal all pervading like the space devoid of all activities, eternally contented, part less of the nature of self light. That where there is no distribution of the nature of self light, that where there is no distribution of the merits and demerits, cause and effect, the present, the past and the future, that disembodied state is liberation. The liberated self regains his real form. In this advaita Brahman Siddhi, Moksa is said to be liberation of the self from avidya. According to Chitsukhacharya Moksa is the attainment of incessant bliss, Moksa is eternal. The self is eternally liberated. Hence, nothing new is gained in liberation since otherwise it shall be non-eternal.

Śankara believes in the possibility of gradual liberation. Commenting on a verse in Prasnopanisad regarding the concentration on Om, he says that such concentration leads to Brahma loka where we gradually attain complete knowledge. Śankara has also maintained. That the worship of the attributed Isvara leads to purification from sins, the attainment of bliss and gradual liberation. Even on the attainment of liberation, the body may continue because it is the product of karmas, which has already borne their effects (Parabdhaka-karma). But the liberated soul does never again identify itself with the body. The world still appears before him, but he is not deceived by it. He does not feel any desire for the world's objects. He is, therefore, not affected by the world's misery. He is in the world and yet out of it. It is a state of perfection attained here. Like Buddha, the Sāṅkhya, the Jaina and some other Indian thinker's, Śankara believes that perfection can be reached even here in this life. It is not an extra mundane prospect, like heaven, to be attained here after in an unperceived future.

According to Śankara, Moksa does not mean the cessation of body, but the extinction of ignorance. Hence he believes in liberation while living (Jivan mukti).²⁶ Just as the wheel of potter remains moving even after the pot is made. Similarly, the man goes on living even after attaining liberation, because there is nothing to stop the earlier continuity of life. Śankara has here given the example of a man who sees double moon due to some defect in the eyes and cannot stop seeing like this, inspite of knowing that, infact there is only one moon.

Liberation is not the production of anything new, nor is the purification of any old state, it is the realization of what is always there even in the stage of bondage, though not known then. For liberation is nothing but the identity of the self and Brahman, which is always real, though not always recognized. The attainment of liberation is therefore compared by the Advaitins to the finding of the necklace on the neck by one who forgot its existence there and searched for it hither and thither. As bondage is due to an illusion, liberation is the only the removal of this illusion. Liberation is not merely the absence of all misery that arises from the illusory sense of distinction between the self and god. The Advaitin conceives it, after Upanishads as a state of positive bliss (ananda) because Brahman is bliss and liberation is identity with Brahman.

Conclusion:

The Human life in the worldly state is incomplete, broken and points beyond itself. It has a goal to achieve a purpose to fulfil and an end to release. This goal is not a matter of direct realization of something, which is existent from eternity, though hidden from our view. It is, as we have seen an establishment of a society of perfect individuals where in the sorrows and the sufferings of the world would cease to exist. This is what we mean by liberation. This liberation of the individual self from the travails of the present earthly life, is not effected by mere wish, nor is it an ideal or ideal apprehension through abstract speculation. It is a realization through proper endeavor. It requires a rigorous discipline, a course of sadhana, which is moral intellectual, spiritual and the consequent mental makeup on the part of the individual.

All the Indian philosophical systems, except Cārvāka, refused to be satisfied by anything less than liberation. Liberation, in fact stands to the pivot round which revolve all the systems of Indian Philosophy. Regarding the positive content of liberation, there is no doubt that the Indian philosophical systems differ among themselves, but they all agree that negatively, liberation is freedom from all kinds of pains and cessation of the cycle of birth and death. The liberation is in fact the realization of the truth from within not something brought from anywhere outside. They all agree that the cause of bondage can be removed and the soul can be made liberated. If, it is liberated once, there is no possibility of its bondage again. Hence, the ultimate aim of human life is to obtain liberation.

Reference:

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