

Concept of Redemption in the World Religions: A Comparative Analysis of the Account of Redemption in Semitic Religions and Indian Religions

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I. Introduction

The ultimate aim of any religion is salvation / redemption of those who believe in it. They embark various paths to experience redemption according to their beliefs and the life of the founders and prominent figures of these religions. Redemption is a common word in the world religions including the Semitic Religions and the Indian Religions. The Semitic Religions are Judaism, Christianity and Islam and the Indian Religions includes Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. Semitic Religions are monotheistic for they believe in one God. They hold fast to the belief of the creation of the world out of nothing and God alone is eternal and all the other things like soul, matter, and scripture are created. Whereas the Indian Religions like Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism have their origin from Hinduism. According to Hinduism, God, Soul, Matter and Scripture are eternal. They believe not in one God but many.

In Semitic Religion, salvation is the saving of the soul from sin and its consequences. It may also be called 'deliverance' or 'redemption' from sin and its effects. Salvation is considered to be caused either by the free will and grace of a deity or by personal efforts through prayer, asceticism, or some combination of the two. Religions often emphasize the necessity of both personal efforts – for example, repentance, asceticism and divine action. In Christianity, one does not do anything for redemption because it is obtained by Christ and for those who believe in him it is freely give.

In Indian Religions one is not liberated from sin and its consequences but from the Samsara (cycle of birth) perpetuated by passion and delusions and its resulting karma. Moksha can be attained by Sadhana that is means of accomplishing something – through Yoga, meditation. Nirvana is the profound peace of mind that is acquired with moksha. In Buddhism and Jainism it is the state of being free from suffering. In Hindu philosophy it is the union with the Brahman (Supreme Being) blowing out of the fires of desires, aversion and delusion and the impertable stillness of mind acquired there – after.

In Judaism, redemption refers to God redeeming the people of Israel from their slaveries this would also mean the final redemption from the present exiles. There are prayers for redemption and there are benedictions in which God is praised as the redeemer of Israel. There are anxious prayers for deliverance from affliction and stress and there are expressions of confident hope and even assurance that redemption will be fulfilled.

Christianity follows the example of Jesus who sacrificed his life for the humanity and brought about redemption. Christians can experience redemption by following the example of Jesus and by the grace they receive through the sacraments or other rituals they perform. They are called to love and even love their enemies; forgive and forgive even those who defame them. They experience redemption not in themselves but being altruistic and committing to the cause of those in need and slaveries. Redemption is setting people free from physical enslavements, psychological discrepancies and spiritual blindness. They attain it through the meaningful celebration of the Liturgy, reading and reflection of the Word of God, ascetic practices, charitable works, selfless service, silence and meditation.

In Islam, redemption is achieved through being a Muslim and doing no action that would forfeit one's identification with Islam, being of sincere faith and doing virtuous actions. Muslim sinners need only turn to a merciful God in repentance and carry out other good deeds, such as prayer and charity, for redemption.

Hinduism speaks of salvation or redemption quiet differently. It is more of personal and one attains it through the good works he/ she does. It emphasises on psycho-somatic-spiritual disciplines like yoga and meditation. They believe that a personal effort is required to experience redemption in their life. Therefore total detachment or renunciation will help them to be free from all objects and body senses of life. We have a few examples in Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886), Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), Sri Aurobindo (1872- 1950) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) who have proven through their life and teaching that redemption is possible and help others to experience redemption in life.

Sikhism is generally understood to be a simple faith. Sikhism aims to create a close, loving relationship with God, particularly through prayer and meditation, or quiet reflection or thought on a single point. It is through prayer, meditation, quiet reflection and service to the people one experiences redemption.

Jainism comes from the word *jina*, which means “conqueror,” and refers to the desire to conquer a person’s own karma and reach the goal of self-liberation. According to Jainism, yoga, the ascetic physical and meditative discipline of the monk, is the means to the attainment of omniscience (*kevala*), and thus to *moksa*, or liberation. Yoga is the cultivation of true knowledge of reality, faith in the teachings of the Tirthankaras, and pure conduct. This is intimately connected to the three jewels (*ratnatraya*) of right knowledge, right belief, and right conduct (respectively: *samayaginana*, *samyagdarsana* and *samyakcarita*).

Buddhism is more a spiritual philosophy than a religion. It expounds on ethics, humanism, compassion and wisdom in order to experience liberation or redemption. Buddha focussed on moving from the self-centeredness to other centeredness for enlightenment or redemption. Buddha himself after his enlightenment engaged in an active public career. He travelled widely for forty five years, founded the *Sangha* or order of the Buddhist fraternity. This article explores the various nuances of the interreligious concept of redemption and its impact on the modern society.

The Concept of Redemption in Judaism

The term Judaism is first found among the Greek-speaking Jews of the first century. The Hebrew equivalent term is *Yahadut* is found only occasionally in medieval literature. Torah is the whole body of Jewish teaching and it means “doctrine,” “teaching.” Judaism refers to the more creative, dynamic elements as manifested in the varied civilizations and cultures of the Jews at the different stages of their history, such as Hellenistic Judaism, rabbinic Judaism, medieval Judaism, Orthodox Judaism, Conservative Judaism and Reform Judaism. Torah refers to the eternal, static elements in Jewish life.¹

According to them Abraham was the founder of monotheism and originator of the faith that God entered into a Covenant with him, that this Covenant was renewed through Isaac and Jacob as an eternal one, and that one element of that Covenant was God’s redemptive relationship with the believers. People who were either descended from the original Abrahamicities, or who had joined them in commitment to their faith, became known as Israel. This religious association called Israel later asserted its origins as harking back to that promise-theology, of having been in the crucible of bondage and of having subsequently enjoyed a miraculous redemption through divine intervention.²

The “Election” of Israel, that God has chosen Israel to be His people and their God, is an idea that permeates all of the Pentateuch, and is the fundamental premise of all the literary prophets. The election is concretized in the revelation at Sinai and its resultant Covenant. The meaning of being elected is to bear the burden of being God’s special people, “a kingdom of priests,” for which purpose the revelation is given. Violation of the special responsibility issues in divine judgement. Creation was for redemption and redemption was for the purpose of the revelation and the revelation consummates the election. The three doctrines of Creation, Revelation and Redemption become the tripod of Israelite religion.³

Messianism and Redemption

The messianic idea developed in Judaism as a response to the national catastrophe and it was to give a hope to those people whose circumstances were often precarious. The word “messiah” is a transcription of the Hebrew *mashiach*, “one who is anointed” with oil for a specific purpose by God. We see innumerable individuals in the Bible termed “messiahs” by virtue of being anointed, and they include kings, priests, prophets, and even non-Israelites. These figures do not link with the later concept of the Messiah who would initiate the redemptive end of time, although passages have often been employed to support one or another messianic vision.⁴

There have been different expectations of the Messiah. When some thought he would come from the royal house of David, some others considered a second Aaron or Moses to inspire the land again with the gift of prophecy. One tradition claimed that the messiah was created at the beginning of time and is waiting with God until the moment of redemption. According to another theory, a potential human messiah walks the earth in every generation. There is even a tradition that a leprous, begging messiah sits at the gates of Rome waiting for his moment in history.⁵

Redemption: A Contemporary Jewish Understanding

Redemption has been one of the major doctrines of Judaism. The idea of *ge’ula*, redemption had tremendous impact on Jewish theology and Jewish life from the Biblical times to our own age. The meaning of the term underwent changes over the centuries. They have prayers for redemption and benedictions in which God is exalted as the redeemer of Israel. Simultaneously there are anxious prayers for deliverance from affliction and stress and there are expressions of optimism and even guarantee that redemption will be fulfilled.

The memory of their redemption from the land of Egypt is remembered in the prayers and that gives them the assurance of the future redemption from the present struggles. According to them, redemption has both physical and spiritual meanings. This has the origin in the sixth chapter of Exodus. God's promise of redemption consists of the idea of the covenant between God and Israel, the deliverance from slavery and affliction, the vow to lead the people to the promised land, and the theological proposition of redemption: 'And I will take you to Me for a people and I will be to you a God, and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God' (Exodus 6:7).⁶

These different perspectives are interwoven into a comprehensive view of redemption. They are not seen as opposing types of redemption but as possibilities which may be fully developed side by side. The physical meaning acquires a more profound and lasting meaning through the emphasis upon the spiritual. Therefore, the concept doesn't lose its meaning in its totality in either case.⁷

There have been questions of whether redemption is conditional upon repentance and the Bible gives various possibilities. For instance, in Deuteronomy (30:1-3) the repentance of the people precedes the redemption. We see the people return to God at first and then God redeems them. The other possibility is elucidated in Ezekiel chapter 36 where God redeems the people when they are still steeped in sin. Both possibilities have been integrated into the visions and hopes for redemption of the Jewish history and the emphasis shifted as circumstances changed.⁸

Galut is political, physical, dispersion, spiritual and religious exile. According to the Jewish theology, there is the 'divine presence' in the exile. As Gershom Scholem has pointed out, Jewish mysticism views the exile of the people of Israel as the concrete and cruel expression of the state-of-exile of the unredeemed world. Israel-in-exile reflects a spiritual situation which must be changed and remedied and it is the task of the people of Israel to bring about the spiritual changes which will put an end to the state-of-exile. *Galut* is not only the divine punishment for the people's sins but also implies the people in exile are entrusted with the task to alter the situation and bring about the redemption, which will also be both spiritual and physical. Therefore, redemption will come as a result of a long, arduous and gradual world of spiritual improvement. *Galut* expresses a spiritual state-of-exile; *ge'ula* will reflect the changed and remedied state of spiritual life. Both exile and redemption contain all the elements and facets of life, the political and physical being intertwined with the inner and the spiritual.⁹

Exile and redemption replicate the continuous movement and the urge for change. Exile may last for centuries but it is expressive of a situation which is bound to change just as in the case of Israel *galut* was replaced by *ge'ula* will herald the redemption of mankind from its exiles. For, *galut* is a concept which acquires its full meaning only when it is related to *ge'ula*. Exile is a situation which constantly points to redemption. There have been cries, both political and spiritual, frightful abomination and extermination of six million Jews by the Nazis. But there arose Zionism to put an end to *galut* by redeeming the Jewish people. Zionist movement advocates progressive redemption, which physical, political and down-to-earth.¹⁰

The political independence of the State of Israel and the physical restoration and reclamation of the land has to happen. The physical revival is an essential component of the spiritual redemption. For physical concerns and spiritual aspirations are inseparable. The sacred cannot exist without the profane. 'The sacred (*kodesh*) and the profane (*chol*) together influence the human spirit and man is enriched by absorbing from each whatever is suitable.' No man can be holy if he is unaware of the functions of the physical world and takes no close interest in them.¹¹

Judaism is universalistic in its vision of the ultimate future of humanity. The messianic expectations are expressed in Zechariah's vision (14:9): 'The Lord shall be King over all the earth; in that day shall the Lord be One and His name one.' The aim of *malkhut shamayim*, the kingdom of heaven is the theme of *alenu*, the concluding prayer of daily morning service and the opening prayer of the services on the New Year and the Day of Atonement. The redemptive process of *ge'ula*, will fulfil its purpose when it will pave the way for *malkhut shamayim*, the kingdom of God on earth.¹²

The Concept of Redemption in Islam

The word "Islam" derived from the term "*salam*" means "peace" or "salvation." The literal meaning of the name "Islam" is "surrender," "reconciliation." The religion revealed to the Prophet Muhammad between 610 and 612 A.D. it is the last of all the Divine revelations before the end of the world. It is the last of the universal religions and today its one of the most flourishing religions. Islam is the third major Semitic religion and has an intimate relationship with the other two; it accepts all the Prophets of Judaism as Prophets of Islam; moreover it also accepts Jesus as a Prophet. He does not have a father but is rather the "Spirit of God" came into Mary.¹³

According to them, salvation is not confined to any particular group. It is for those who surrender before God and do right things. Such people will be rewarded by God, and there be no fear for them, neither shall they grieve. This reveals that salvation is a matter exclusively in the hands of God who is well above all prejudices and partisanship. Man has social responsibility and can attain salvation by discharging duties towards others. The idea of one Almighty God implied the idea of one humanity as a family whose members were equal

in the service of God. Thus, a strong sense of the brotherhood and they are responsible for each other's welfare and no individual or group of people could thrive at the expense of others. Caring for others is helping one's own self.¹⁴

Redemption, then, in Islam begins with Adam, who was made for the earth. He descends to earth, and the battle between good and evil begins on its true stage, the earth. Redemption is when this battle is finally concluded with the divine victory, with the victory of the Good. The Qur'an speaks not of ransom by sacrifice even though we do a commemorative sacrifice at the time of the hajj to commemorate the sacrifice of Abraham, but the Qur'an insists that then neither the fat nor the blood of the animals reaches God. What reaches him is our piety or righteousness. So expiation or takfir of sin must be done by the individual himself, and here, then, redemption is what men and women do with their own sin through repentance and through expiation through prayers, fasts, sharing their wealth with the poor, and so on. So, then, wholeness, redemption, salvation, restoration can be achieved through personal expiation and through intercession widely considered.¹⁵

The Concept of Redemption in Christianity

According to Christian theology, redemption is an element of salvation and deliverance from sin. The English word "redemption" means 'repurchase' or 'buy back', and in the Old Testament it is referred to the ransom of slaves. In the New Testament, the redemption refers to both to deliverance from sin and freedom from captivity. Theologically, redemption is a metaphor for what is achieved through the atonement; death of Jesus pays the price of a ransom, releasing Christians from bondage to sin and death.

Christianity follows the example of Jesus who sacrificed his life for the humanity and brought about redemption. Christians can experience redemption by following the example of Jesus and by the grace they receive through the sacraments or other rituals they perform. They are called to love and even love their enemies; forgive and forgive even those who defame them. They experience redemption not in themselves but being altruistic and committing to the cause of those in need and slaveries. Jesus redeemed the last and the least; wicked and the sinner; tax collectors and prostitutes; rich and the poor; saint and the sinner. He forgot about himself and was available to the people around. He earned souls not by punishing but by loving, for example, the gospel of John speaks about a woman who came to draw water from the well. She was a known sinner but Jesus touched her life and she was transformed. The gospel of Luke portrays the life of a tax collector named Zaccodius. He was on the top of a tree to see Jesus, he desired to see Jesus but Jesus called him and walked with him to his house. He was redeemed. Saul, in the Acts of the Apostles, for example was a man who was determined to persecute all the Christians but he was transformed and he became a source of inspiration for many to experience redemption. Peter, the first Pope, was an impulsive person; he was hyperactive and would even object his master at times but he was redeemed and redeemed many others. Redemption is setting people free from physical enslavements, psychological discrepancies and spiritual blindness. They attain it through the meaningful celebration of the Liturgy, reading and reflection of the Word of God, ascetic practices, charitable works, selfless service, silence and meditation.

The Evolution of Hinduism

Hinduism is one of the oldest religions in existence and it ranks as the world's third largest religion. It was born in India but was not founded by one individual. It is the result of a coming together of many religious beliefs and philosophical schools. The name Hindu came into use when the Persians, in their attempt to label the non-Muslim people living beyond the Sindhu River, mispronounced the word Sindhu. Thereafter, Arabs, Turks, Afghans and Mughals used the term Hindu just for the sake of convenience.

In order to understand the origin Hinduism, one has to begin with Indus valley civilization, which is said to have flourished in the Indian subcontinent around 2700 BC. Since the script of the Indus valley people has not yet been translated, our knowledge of the religion and culture of the civilization remain vague. Nevertheless, extensive excavations in Harrappa and Mohenjo-daro and other Indus valley sites have yielded enough evidence to indicate that the worship of Shiva could probably be traced to this source.¹⁶

The recorded textual history of the Hindus can be said to begin with the Vedas. This is not a single book but an entire literature. Hindus claim that no human agency was ever responsible for the creation of Vedas but they existed from the time of creation and will exist for all eternity. From generation to generation the Vedas have been transmitted through the oral tradition. Vedic literary history is usually divided into three periods: the *Samhita*, the *Brahmana* and the *Upanishad* period. Hinduism has been shaped by what can be called its three main traditions: the ritualistic, the mystical and the devotional. Each of these are ways of visualizing the Absolute.¹⁷

Hindu Ethics for Integral Way of Living

Although Hinduism is not generally known for its pronounced view on morals and ethics, it stands alongside the Judeo-Christian tradition in support of right conduct and altruistic behaviour. The bedrock of

Judeo-Christian ethics is found in the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you” (Mathew 7.12). The Mahabharata (5.15.7), India’s great epic, shares the same sentiments: “This is the sum of duty: Do not do to others that which would cause pain if done to you.” In Hinduism also there is a set of teachings that correspond to the Ten Commandments which are called Yamas and Niyamas.¹⁸

The Hindu way of life is popularly called Hindu Dharma. The word ‘dharma’ means that which supports or upholds the world of living beings. By upholding dharma, living beings can live in harmony and ultimately cosmic order is maintained. Dharma is neither an abstract idea nor a set of rules to be followed blindly in daily life rather it is the conscious adoption of the principles of a perfect life in the world.¹⁹

According to the Hinduism, every individual passes through four stages of development in life, excluding childhood, namely, youth, adulthood, middle age and old age. Similarly, a person is born and brought up in one or other section and class in the society. So, we have the four stages in the development of the moral life of an individual. These are described as *brahmacharya* or student life, *grihastha* or family life, *vanaprastha* or retired life, and *sannyasa* or life of renunciation. These four are described as four *ashrama-s* or stages in one’s life. The first stage in the moral life of the individual is known as *brahmacharya* where the individual lives the life of self-control. *Grihastha* is the second stage in the moral life of the individual and it is the sacred duty of every youth to get married and have children.²⁰ It is a religious order of life in which one has to look upon one’s own wife as a partner in co-operative, socio-religious endeavours to work out one’s salvation. So also the wife looks upon herself as a partner in the husband’s religious life. *Vanaprastha* is the third stage and it is the stage of semi-retirement when one guides and prepares his progeny for their future life and himself begins to detach. His duties include the study of texts, austerity, equanimity, amity, readiness to give and not to take anything, and love and compassion for all living beings. The ascetic life is referred to as the stage of *sanyasa*. At this stage a man renounces in spirit everything of the world and rests calmly, meditating on God. He is free from attachment to all objects including his body senses of life. Such a soul is liberated from all bondage to the world.²¹

The Concept of Salvation / Redemption in Hinduism

The Sanskrit term for ‘deliverance’ or ‘salvation’ is *mukti* or *moksa*, i.e. ‘deliverance’ or release’ in general, from pains and penalties of any kind. In all systems *mukti* or *moksa* denotes that deliverance from bondage to the world and its fetters which is desired and ideal end of Hindu religious life. The *mukta* is one who is liberated from all that hampers from fullness of life, who has been released from the confined and restrained conditions of earthly existence, and has entered into a state of endless freedom and bliss, which is not subject to change or liable to distress and harm.²²

History and Development of the Doctrine of Salvation / Redemption

We find statements with regard to the nature and character of *mukti* in the *Upanisad* literature, and in the commentaries of Sankara and Ramanuja on the Vedanta Sutras.²³ The religious aspect of *mukti* and its value for the individual soul are described Bhagavad Gita and in the popular religious literature of the sects. In the early literature of the Vedic hymns deliverance is by favour of the gods. The prayers and aspirations of the worshippers were concerned with the achieving of earthly good, and it was limited to the present life. The benefits were conducive for temporal well-being and enjoyment so also deliverance from the adverse conditions of the present earthly existence.

By the arrival of *rsis* and poets the idea of salvation conceived in material, not spiritual terms and meant to rescue from pain and penalties of a troubled life to a state of existence more profusely endowed with earthly goods. The future beyond the grave was not illuminated by a hope which made the present life seem insignificant in comparison nor did it bear any sure prevention view for the evil doer. It is in *Upanisads* and the philosophical systems based upon them that the Hindu conception of *mukti* is most fully elucidated. This teaching was systematized in the Vedanta under the influence and guidance of Sankara, and became the dominant conception of Hindu religious thought. Accordingly, one had to flee from the world to be united with the deity. This doctrine appears complete and is enforced as the one reasonable and adequate view of the character and fate of the human soul.²⁴

The Methods for the Attainment of Salvation / Redemption

Christianity has always emphasized the necessity of moral reformation and effort in order to attain redemption; it is by the human endeavour that co-operates with grace of God. The element of strain and search in man’s part is not completely absent from this form of Buddhism. The Hindu doctrine in particular relegates the realization of salvation to a distant and uncertain future. It has not formulated, and on its premises it was hardly possible that it should formulate, a doctrine of present and immediate deliverance from the tension and distress of life, or from the clutches of evil. Only at the close of a series of rebirths and suffering in this world is deliverance achieved. When the power of *karma* is exhausted, and no more fruit of deeds remains to be gathered, the end is reached as it were automatically, *mukiti* is accomplished. The way to *mukti* is hard and long,

and not all have the courage and good fortune to persevere through successive births, and by zeal and devotion and good works to hasten the desired end. Salvation is from the power and grip of *karma* to a union with the divine, when there will be no further rebirth to the servitude and misery of a life on earth.²⁵

The idea of the immortality of the soul is the basis of Hindu ethics. The law of karma and the Hindu doctrine of bondage and liberation of the soul are also related to the immortality of the soul. Since the soul is imperfect, due to its karmic particles, it has to take numerous births for attaining perfection and liberation from bondage. Hindu religion believes in an eternal moral order and its different forms. According to the law of Karma, all the values, positive or negative, accruing from a man's actions, remain conserved for him and are capable of bringing him joy and sorrow in this or another life. The faith in an eternal moral order inspires hope and confidence in man and makes him the master of his own destiny. It enables Hindu philosophy and religion to take an optimistic view of things and treat the present sufferings as the fruit of the past deeds and hold out the hope of a better future by leading a better and nobler life. God can forgive and individual's sins and grant liberation from bondage.²⁶

The idea of bondage and liberation are typical to the Indian philosophy and religion. All the Indian systems of philosophy and schools of religion recognize liberation (*mukti*) as the ultimate end of human life. According to the Hindu view, the individual self is a given and immutable reality, which is quite distinct from and independent of the body and mind with which it may be associated for the time being. All the miseries of the soul are on account of its identification with a particular mind-body and this constitutes its bondage to the world.²⁷ Therefore, there is nothing in the intrinsic nature of the individual soul that makes it liable to sin and suffering, pain and misery. Soul, in its original nature, is divine; it is the pure spirit, which is free and blissful in its essential nature. Liberation of the individual soul means the recovery of its original nature, the restoration of its pristine glory. Liberation or freedom of the self does not mean its development from a less perfect to a more perfect condition but it is the realization of the real nature. Liberation is neither a future possibility nor a conditional immortality rather it is the birthright of the soul to realize its divinity which is hidden in it. Liberation is perfect realization of the divinity of the soul and it may be possible in this life or some other life in the remote future. Human being is a composite of body, mind and soul; body binds the individual to this world with hunger, thirst and sensual appetites; mind has a natural impulse towards carnal pleasures and worldly material and is swayed by passions, hatred and infatuation. However, the soul in the human being, refuses to be laid low with the burden of the body, but it is lost in the maze of the natural inclinations and drives of the mind. Human person's spirit wants to ascend high above the limitations of the body-mind and realize its goal of liberation from bondage.²⁸

Hinduism speaks about two stages in the course of liberation and they are *pravrtti* and *nivrtti*. The first stage is a movement of the soul in the direction of desired objects of enjoyment and it is a genus of outgoing activity of the soul. The other is in fact, a bent of the soul to move away from objects, and towards its own subjective being. It is an inwardly directed activity of the soul. *Nivrtti* is renunciation in spirit and not necessarily in action and practice. In the full course of maturity of the individual soul there should be the two stages of *pravrtti* and *nivrtti*, of enjoyment and renunciation.²⁹

Yoga is closely related to Samkhya and adds the element of the Lord (*Ishvara*). This is one of the methods of attaining the ultimate goal of redemption by mastering body and mind through physical exercises and meditation. According to Yoga Sutra, since Brahman is located within us, he could be perceived by self-realization. It is possible only if we withdraw our senses from the external world and discover the reality within.³⁰ Yoga is a means to attain salvation. Yoga implies the joining of human consciousness to the Divine Being. It involves physical and mental disciplines directed at control over mental and bodily functions, specially breathing. If properly adhered to under the guidance of a qualified teacher, it results in the consciousness of the seeker being gradually raised until the Atman shines forth in its pristine glory as pure consciousness. This path also involves arousal of the 'Kundalini Shakti' or serpent-power, believed to be located at the base of the human spine. As this power rises through a series of occult centers or 'Chakras' located in various parts of the body, the consciousness is correspondingly elevated, until finally it bursts into the highest chakra at the top of the brain – the 'Sahasrara' or thousand-petalled lotus where the merger between the Atman and the Brahman takes place and the seeker is plunged in the highest bliss. This elevated state, known as 'Samadhi', is the goal of all yogic practices.³¹

A Hindu is supposed to model his life according to the dharmic norm prescribed in the Laws of Manu. He must obey caste laws and follow the stages of life. If he/she leads an ideal life, as described in the sacred text, he will achieve liberation.³²

For the theist, spiritual liberation is identifies with the love which becomes central and persuasive in the sphere of experience. God, none other than love itself is the exact expression of perfect deliverance. God's self-revelation and man's liberation from self-estrangement coincide in the moment of experience of love. The love of God means avowedly a corresponding love towards the concrete, individual, unique here and now. It is in the meeting of these two that moksha liberates and enlarges human existence.³³

Liberation is liberation from pain, suffering and loss. From estrangement of every kind. From the dubious and vulnerable character of human existence. It is liberation or freedom to do. The free man, religiously speaking, is one who is unhindered in his freedom of volitional conformity or coincidence with the Divine. It is the freedom of enjoying union with God. Freedom to enjoy is another way of saying freedom from any sort of engagement or impediment that stands in the way of fulfilling one's will to enjoy. It is freedom from impediments of both commission and omission. Again, the expression 'free from' suggests that one is happy and relieved to be without those things one is freed from.³⁴

The Evolution of Jainism

Jainism comes from the word *jina*, which means "conqueror," and refers to the desire to conquer a person's own karma and reach the goal of self-liberation. It was founded in the sixth century B.C.E. and is the oldest ascetic religious tradition. It is an ethical belief system and the focal point is the moral life of the individual. Mahavira ("great hero") is considered the founder of Jainism.³⁵ Mahavira was the 24th and last Tirthankara (literally, "Ford-maker"). 'Tirthankaras are revealers of the Jain' religious paths (dharma), who have crossed over life's stream of rebirths and have set the example that all Jinas must follow. Mahavira was a contemporary of Sidhartha Gautama. Like the Buddha, Mahavira was the son of a chieftain of the Kshatriya class. He renounced his princely status at the age of 30 to take up the ascetic life.³⁶ He rejected Hinduism, renounced his family and wealth, and left his wife and child. He practiced extreme asceticism and ahimsa, or non injury to other living things. His course of therapy comprised travelling naked, tearing at his hair and beard, and visiting different regions during periods of extreme heat and cold. He refused excessive contact with other people to avoid forming attachment and nullified all sense of desire for earthly pleasures. After twelve years Mahavira reached a state of *moksha* here he was released from the bonds of rebirth. Thereafter, he committed his life time to preaching and teaching his beliefs.³⁷

The Concept of Liberation / Redemption in Jainism

The Jain's religious aspiration is the complete excellence and cleansing of the soul. This can occur only when the soul is in a state of eternal liberation from the things of this world. Liberation is obstructed by the accumulation of karmas, bits of material, produced by a person's actions, which bind themselves to the soul and subsequently bind the soul to material bodies through many births. This spoils the full self realization and freedom of the soul.³⁸ The life of Tirthankaras teaches that one can attain liberation of their soul through meditation and self-denial. They taught the method of salvation before departing from their mortal bodies. According to them redemption lay in one's own destiny and that there should not be a separate priestly class, only people who can help depict the route to self-liberation.³⁹

The underlying principle of Jainism is that all living things have an immortal soul (*jiva*) that should strive to be liberated from matter (*ajiva*). The *jiva* is reincarnated after death but it is almost always held down by karma- a form of matter that clings to the *jiva* through desires (both good and bad) in present and past lives. To free the soul from karma a person must perform austerities to achieve a state of desirelessness in which the karma is stripped away.⁴⁰

"The following are the route ways to achieve the goal described by Mahavira as the Five Great Vows:

1. *Renouncing the killing of all living things and denying the right of others to kill. Known as ahimsa, this involves taking extraordinary steps to make sure that one does not internally or inadvertently kill any living thing. Jainists often strain water before drinking it, ear masks to prevent accidentally swallowing insects, and refuse to eat meat or work in any job, such as being a butcher, soldier, farmer, or fisherman, that may contribute to the death or harm of others. Jainists also refuse to participate in the sale or manufacture of weapons, alcohol, or drugs.*
2. *Renouncing all vices associated with lies arising from fear, laughter, anger and greed.*
3. *Renouncing all forms of stealing and refusing to accept anything that is not given freely.*
4. *Renouncing all sexual pleasures, including the acknowledgment of the sensuality of women, whom Mahavira described as "the greatest temptation in the world."*
5. *Renouncing all forms of attachment that cause pleasure or pain, love or hate, and encouraging others to do so."*⁴¹

According to Jainism, the individual's soul-substance (*jiva*) is mingled with karmic substance to produce a person. All actions, good and evil, past and present, produce karmic particles that weigh one down and bind one to endless rebirth. Liberation (*moksha*) consists in freedom from rebirth by stumbling the arrival of new karmic particles and by eliminating those acquired from the past through disciplines of knowledge and ascetic practices. The most famous teaching of Jainism, no injury (*ahimsa*) to every living being, is based on the perception that all forms of life possess *jiva*. As extended in Jainism, this is not only means restraint from physically injuring any sort of animal, but also the rejection of psychological and intellectual violence.⁴²

Theories of Knowledge as Applied to Liberation

In Jaina thought, *Jnana* or knowledge is an intrinsic property of the *atma* or soul. Every soul possesses an infinite capacity of knowing. Therefore, the process of knowing is the process of the manifestation by the soul of its intrinsic nature. This intrinsic nature of a living being is covered by matter in which Karma operates. Hence the process of knowledge differs according to the stages of development. Thus the theory of knowledge is based upon the metaphysical postulate that knowledge is the intrinsic property of the soul. The senses and mind of a living being, up to a certain stage, serve as means of knowledge. In the case of the soul, it is both the subject and the object of knowledge at the same time. Knowledge therefore, is like a lamp which in consequence of its luminosity reveals other objects as well as itself. It is all the time in the soul itself, waiting to be unconstrained or manifested. The first requirement is the knowledge derived from the observation of nature. Next, step by step, come knowledge of the scriptures or of other people's experiences, of objects remote in time and space, of other minds, and finally, perfect knowledge of everything. This staged development of knowledge has the following technical terms: *mati*, *sruta*, *avadhi*, *manahpariyaya*, *kevala*. The first two are possible to any human being, the next two to the sages, and the last to a perfect being only. Human knowledge is always relative. To know is to relate. Therefore our knowledge is essentially relative and limited in many ways. Our thought is relative. The total reality in its completeness cannot be grasped by partial thought. The same is the case with our speech too. What we say is also relative and conditioned. This theory is known as *Anekanta*.⁴³

According to Jainism, yoga, the ascetic physical and meditative discipline of the monk, is the means to the attainment of omniscience (*kevala*), and thus to *moksa*, or liberation. Yoga is the cultivation of true knowledge of reality, faith in the teachings of the Tirthankaras, and pure conduct. This is intimately connected to the three jewels (*ratnatraya*) of right knowledge, right belief, and right conduct (respectively: *samayaginana*, *samyagdarsana* and *samyakcarita*).⁴⁴

The Evolution of Buddhism

The founder of Buddhism in this world is Buddha Shakyamuni. He was born as a royal prince in 624 BC in a place called Lumbini, which was originally in northern India but is now part of Nepal. 'Shakya' is the name of the royal family into which he was born and 'Muni' means 'Able One'. His parents gave him the name Siddhartha and there were many wonderful predictions about his future. In his early years he lived as a prince in his royal palace but when he was 29 years old he retired to the forest where he followed a spiritual life of meditation. After six years he attained enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree in Bodh Gaya, India. His intention in founding Buddhism was to lead living beings to permanent liberation from suffering. He realized temporary liberation from suffering and difficulties is not enough. Motivated by love and compassion his aim was to help living beings find lasting peace or nirvana, which is known as redemption in Buddhism.⁴⁵

The Significance of Buddhist Nirvana / Redemption

The literal meaning of *nirvana* is the extinction or annihilation of passion. It is positive in Buddhism. According to Buddha, 'existence is suffering' he does not mean that human life is simply full of suffering without any pleasure at all. It is obvious that there is pleasure and suffering in human life. The real suffering lies in this very inclination. Pleasure and suffering are in reality inseparable. The more we try to cling to pleasure and avoid suffering, the more entangled we become in the duality of pleasure and suffering. It is the whole process which constitutes Suffering. When Gautama the Buddha says 'existence is suffering', he is referring to this Suffering and not suffering as opposed to pleasure.⁴⁶

Accordingly, when Gautama the Buddha says 'cause of suffering is craving', he means by craving not simply the attachment to pleasure but a deeper and more fundamental attachment that is rooted in human existence, that of loving pleasure and hating suffering, with its accompanying phenomenon of making a distinction between the two. Craving is a human passion linked to man's entanglement in the duality of pleasure and suffering, and deeply rooted in the ego. It is by extinguishing this craving that *nirvana* can be attained. Thus *nirvana* is not a negative or lifeless state but an *existential awakening* to egolessness, *anatta* or *anatman* attained through liberation from craving, the attachment to the dualistic view which distinguishes between pleasures as something to be sought after and suffering to be avoided.⁴⁷

Gautama the Buddha takes the Middle Way and it is not a midpoint between pleasure and suffering, but rather is the Way which transcends the very duality of pleasure and suffering. Thus living the Middle Way is none other than being in *nirvana*. For Buddhism, the Middle Way is an existential ground from which human life can properly begin without becoming entangled in the duality of pleasure and suffering. By living the Middle Way, in *nirvana*, we can be master of, and not slave to, pleasure and suffering. In this sense, *nirvana* is the source of human freedom and creative activity. To attain *nirvana* as *existential awakening* to egolessness or going beyond any kind of duality, including that of good and evil, right and wrong, life and death, man and nature, and even that of man and God is redemption in Buddhism.⁴⁸

Monism is not yet free from duality, for it is still opposed to dualism or pluralism. Being beyond duality, the view of one who has attained nirvana is not monistic but rather non dualistic. This is why Buddhism does not proclaim only one God, but speaks of *Sunyata* (Emptiness). Emptiness is realized by going beyond one God and thus is not the relative emptiness of a mere vacuum. In Emptiness, all is all in the sense that all is as it is and at the same time all is equal in its as-it-is-ness. Both Emptiness, the negation of Oneness, and egolessness, the negation of everything's self-centeredness are necessary for awakening. This very realization is the source of wisdom and compassion in which both ignorance and self-centeredness are overcome. Just because *nirvana* is in itself empty, it is full of particular things functioning freely, neither losing their particularity nor impeding each other.⁴⁹

Nirvana, a freedom beyond Nihilism and Anthropocentrism

One of the problems in the world today is the permeation of nihilism such as was proclaimed by Friedrich Nietzsche. The distortion of traditional value systems and a cry of 'God is dead' are somewhat universal phenomena in our growing world. A loss of the sense of the holy and despair of established forms of religion prevail in our midst. It has become more and more difficult for modern man to believe in 'God' with the pervasion of the scientific way of thinking; yet people today are searching seriously for something fill the vacuum which has been creped in our spiritual lives. In this respect, Nietzsche's active nihilism is a touchstone for religion, for he advocated as a prototype of future man the active nihilist who being based on the Will of Power, courageously faces emptiness without God. However, it is unlikely that Nietzsche's active nihilism can successfully serve as a substitute for religion. It would seem that what is needed today and in the future is a religion beyond active nihilism, i.e. a religion beyond 'emptiness without God'. Buddhism, which is based on *nirvana*, is precisely a religion of this sort. Negating the existence of one God, Buddhism advocates Sunyata (Emptiness) which is not a nihilistic emptiness but rather a fullness of particular things and individual men functioning fully and without hindrance. In Emptiness, everything is realized as it is, in its total dynamic reality. This radical realism involves not only liberation from 'God' but also the overcoming of an active nihilism such as advocated by Nietzsche. Nirvana is a realization of great freedom, both from theistic pietism with its dependence on God and from nihilism with its dependence on the Will to Power, making possible self-determination by removing the illusion of a determinator.⁵⁰

According to Christian scholars, Buddhist nirvana is impersonal. Christian personalism is based on man's responsibility to the Word of God. Human beings, unlike other creatures, are created in God's image and can respond to the calling of God. God rules the nature through human beings and it is to them that God gave 'dominion over' other creatures. In this sense, Christian personalism is connected with anthropocentrism.⁵¹ Contrary to this, Buddhist nirvana is based on egolessness and is not anthropocentric but rather cosmological. In Buddhism, man and nature are equally subject to change, transitory and transmigratory. Human beings cannot achieve emancipation from the cycle of birth and death until they can eliminate a more universal problem- the transience common to all things in the universe. We see that the basis of Buddhist redemption is cosmological, not personalistic as in terms of an I-Thou relationship with God, and thus impersonal and trans-anthropocentric. However, it is only human beings with their self-consciousness and free will who can go beyond anthropocentrism and reach an awareness that transience is not limited to man but is common to all things. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Buddhist redemption is primarily concerned with individual persons, not necessarily man in general, for, as is written in a Scripture, 'One is born alone, dies alone, comes alone, and goes alone.' In this sense Buddhism may also be said to be personalistic and existentialistic where human being is understood as a being with self-consciousness and free will on a cosmological basis which includes all of nature. Without the realization of transience and selflessness on such a cosmological basis, a person cannot become an 'awakened one'. In short, for an awakened one who is living nirvana, universal salvation is completely realized in the here and now, and yet it is to be realized endlessly in the process of history by those who think themselves to be 'unsaved'.⁵²

The Evolution of Sikhism

Sikhism is generally understood to be a simple faith. For the strictly orthodox Sikh the faith which by preference he calls Gurmat can be regarded as nothing less than the product of direct revelation from God. Gurmat means 'the Guru's doctrine'. God, the original Guru, imparted his message to his chosen disciple Nanak who, intuitively apprehended the message, thereby absorbed the divine spirit and became himself the Guru. This same divine spirit passed at Nanak's death into the body of his successor, Guru Angad, and in this manner dwelt successively within a series of ten personal Gurus. At the death of the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, the divine spirit remained present within the sacred scripture and the community of the Guru's followers. He who accepts the teachings of the Gurus as recorded in the scripture or expressed in the corporate will of the community is truly a Sikh.⁵³

Sikhism is practiced by some twenty-three million people worldwide, with most living in the state of Punjab in India. Sikhism aims to create a close, loving relationship with God, particularly through prayer and meditation, or quiet reflection or thought on a single point.⁵⁴

The Concept of Redemption in Sikhism

Sikhism believes in redemption through charitable works. They run charitable institutions, such as hospitals and free feeding-houses for the poor. Where charity is concerned the Sikhs do not make any distinction of caste or creed because their religion instructs them to look upon all mankind with brotherly feelings. The founder of the Sikh faith was Guru Nanak. He believed in living beyond religions. When one considers oneself as Hindu or Muslim, one is restricting ones growth. Guru Nanak's compassion, universal in its scope, embrace all mankind. The sufferings of the common Muslims, the poor working folk, pained him no less than the sufferings of Hindus. His message to Muslims and to Hindus was message of humanity, good will, compassion and high ethical conduct. According to him, one can triumph over maya and reach a state of Samadhi or mystic state through prayer, meditation and seva or selfless service to mankind. The seeker, under the Guru's guidance, must supplicate grace through prayer, humble service and meditation and grace may descend upon him. With divine grace he will be able to achieve mukti, moksha or liberation. Sikhism brought back the ancient wisdom of Gita to masses by synthesis of spirituality and action.⁵⁵

II. Conclusion

We live in a world where there is a growing dialogue between people of living faiths and ideologies. As I have mentioned at the outset of this article, the ultimate goal of human life or any religion is redemption. Semitic religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam and Indian religions like Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism have the concept of redemption but they differ in their interpretations and perspectives. All the religions speak about selfless service, discipline and dependence on the divine grace through personal effort. These are the means that help people to experience redemption. Buddhist speaks about self-examination, Catholics reiterates examination of conscience and psychologists emphasizes self awareness or consciousness as means for change, transformation and liberation. When one is caught up with self, one cannot experience redemption, one has to journey towards the other through self less service just like the aforementioned models in each religion. There are innumerable people who have walked before us and showed us the way of redemption. They are remembered and venerated today because they paved a way before us to experience redemption in life. We can love without possessing, we can serve with passion, we can experience happiness in the works we do and lead others to the same.

Judaism speaks about *Ge'ula*, *Galua* and *malkhut shamayim* in relation to the concept of redemption. *Ge'lua* is redemption and it is a process initiated through a covenant which links man to the redemptive plan and *Galut* means exile and the exile is a crisis that is in need of redemption. This exile, slavery, affliction, catastrophe brings about the need of *Ge'lua* that is redemption. The *Galut* may be physical, spiritual, religious or political. This can be called pre – redemptive process and the redemptive process is achieved through personal effort to overcome the crisis through repentance and also through messianic intervention that initiates a process of *ge'ula* through a covenant. The end result of process of redemption or *ge'ula* is *malkhut shamayim*, the kingdom of God on earth, which is the post – redemptive process. The process can be stated as follows: pre – redemptive process; redemptive process and post – redemptive process. In the redemptive process one can be open to the process through pro- redemptive response or be closed through counter – redemptive response.

The literal meaning of the name “Islam” is surrender, or reconciliation. The very name proposes the humanity is in need of liberation to experience peace. According to Islam, salvation is not confined to any particular group but for those who surrender before God and do right things. This reveals the fact that human being is in need of redemption and a constant battle between good and bad is going on, that is the redemptive process through repentance, expiation, prayers, fasts, sharing of wealth to the poor. This will enable them enter into the realm of post – redemptive process where they enjoy peace or shalom. The process in Islam can be drawn as follows: pre – redemptive process, the crisis that emerged through the disobedience of Adam the first prophet. The redemptive process is the battle between the good and evil and victory over evil through the pro – redemptive response. The ultimate outcome is the post – redemptive process where one experiences peace.

Christianity believes there was a state of serenity in the paradise but through the disobedience of Adam and Eve sin crept into society. There was a need of restoring the lost union because of sin and that is pre – redemptive process; the process of redemption is where an individual exercises ones free will to recover from the fall; one can make a pro – redemptive response where one is open to the process and one can also make a counter – redemptive response where one can shut oneself to the process like Judas in the gospel. Peter, the disciple of Jesus, is an example to the pro – redemptive response because he used his free will to transform his human follies through his repentance, selfless service and following the example of Jesus. He made use of the grace given to him by the merit of his life through the cooperation with the divine grace. Jesus paid the price for

the redemption through his death and resurrection. Christianity discloses to the world that one doesn't have to be a slave of passionate desires and inordinate attachment to the things of the world. One can experience liberation through the grace and personal effort. This will make one enter into the post – redemptive process where one will experience peace and shalom.

The Indian religions highlight the fact that the human being is attached to the things of the world. This makes the notion clear that the human being is in need of liberation because of the bondage to the world and it hampers the ability to enjoy the fullness of life. Therefore Hinduism proposes the idea of '*mukti*' or '*moksa*' where one will be freed from the pains and penalties of any kind. We can infer that there is a pre – redemptive process which beckons us to enter into the process of redemption or *mukti*. The way to *mukti* is hard and long, and not all have the courage and good fortune to persevere it. Soul is imperfect due to karmic particles, it has to take numerous births for attaining perfection and liberation from bondage. The ultimate end of human life is liberation or *mukti*. There are two stages in the course of liberation and they are *pravrtti* and *nivrtti*. The first stage is a movement of the soul in the direction of desired objects of enjoyment and it is a genus of outgoing activity of the soul. The other is a bent of the soul to move away from objects towards its own subjective being. Another way of attaining redemption is through yoga which enables the individual to master body and mind through physical exercises and meditation. According to Yoga Sutra, since Brahman is located within us, he could be perceived by self-realization. It is possible only if we withdraw our senses from the external world and discover the reality within. Yoga implies the joining of human consciousness to the Divine Being which is *Samadhi*, that is post – redemptive process. One is totally free from the things of this world and enjoys union with God.

Jainism helps people to conquer a person's *karama* and reach the goal of self-liberation or *moksha*. There is a need for redemption because of the karmic effects and cycle of birth. This is the pre – redemptive process. At the age Mahavira renounced all the pleasures of life and began to conquer his *karama*. He rejected Hinduism, renounced his family and wealth, and left his wife and child. He practiced extreme asceticism and ahimsa, or no injury to other living things. He walked naked; refused excessive contact with other people to avoid forming attachment and nullified all sense of desire for earthly pleasures. He entered into the process of redemption and it was pro – redemptive response from his side and it lasted about twelve years. Thus he entered into the post – redemptive process that is *moksha* where he enjoyed freedom of the soul from all attachments. According to Jainism, Yoga, the ascetic physical and meditative discipline of the monk, is the means to the attainment of omniscience (*kevala*), and thus to *moksha*, or liberation.

Buddhism proposes nirvana as a means for annihilation of passion. According to Buddha, cause of suffering is craving. Craving is a human passion linked to man's entanglement in the duality of pleasure and suffering, and deeply rooted in the ego. It is by extinguishing this craving that nirvana can be attained. This proves the fact there is a process to have this existential awakening. The process can be explained as follows: the pre – redemptive process which challenges the human being to enter into the redemptive process where an individual can have two responses a pro – redemptive response or a counter redemptive response. They believe that human beings with their self-consciousness and free will can go beyond anthropocentrism and reach awareness that transience is not limited to man but is common to all things. This is the redemptive process in Buddhism which will lead to post – redemptive process where one enjoys nirvana, awakened state.

Sikhism adheres to the attainment of the state of Samadhi, which is the post – redemptive process. This is *mukti*, *moksha* or liberation. The redemptive process is through prayer, meditation, *seva* or selfless service. One can choose to follow this process and it is pro – redemptive response which will actually lead to the state of Samadhi. If one shuts oneself to the process, it is counter – redemptive response. There is always the need of redemption which is pre – redemptive process and the rest takes an individual who is in search to experience redemption.

The process is same in the religions where it is Semitic or Indian. There is a need of redemption which can be termed as pre – redemptive process which impels the individual to enter into the other process that is redemptive process which is hard some according to the choice made by the individual. There are two possibilities before an individual and they are either to make a pro – redemptive response or counter – redemptive response. The first one is a positive response which will lead one into the other process that is post – redemptive response. The latter is a negative response and it doesn't make any transformation. The end is same in all the religions but the means are different.

There are many novelists who have been inspired by these perspectives of interreligious concept of redemption and have contributed to the society through their powerful writings. They are Nathaniel Hawthorne and Graham Greene. They bring out the dichotomy of sin and redemption in their fictions. They give hope to the world that there is always possibility for liberation. One doesn't have to be a slave of passionate desires and inordinate attachment to the things of the world. Through constant self-examination or awareness and consciousness one can experience and let others know-how happiness and redemption can be attained in our life

here on earth. The whisky priest in the Power and Glory is a typical example of this self-examination or self awareness. Dimmesdale and Hester in Scarlet Letter are paradigms of liberation and redemption.

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