

The Hindu Conception of *Mukti* and the Christian Idea of Salvation

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Freedom, *mukti*, is the ultimate goal of spiritual life in Hinduism and salvation is the aim of the Christian religious life. Being the consummation of life, *mukti* and salvation may seem to have much similarity as ideas and ideals, though differences are admitted. It is said, for example, that *mukti* obliterates all individuality, but salvation enables man to find his true personal individuality. It is also asserted that, while for salvation the grace of God is indispensable, the process of *mukti* has no use for it. Neither of these two statements seems to be wholly correct.

While *mukti*, according to the Shankara school of Vedanta, means deliverance from the false knowledge of any distinction or duality as real, it is not the only or entire conception of *mukti*, for there are other interpretations of the ultimate goal of life in Hinduism. All the schools of Vedanta, save that of Shankara, and the dualistic schools of Shaivism and Shāktism are of the view that *mukti* necessarily means the individual's relationship with the Supreme. Thus the realization of pure identity or the retaining of distinct individuality cannot be the *sine qua non* of *mukti*.

The essential feature of *mukti*

Mukti, then, is liberation from the existence in the world and all its attendant misery. This empirical existence is due to the false knowledge of the Self (Ātman) as that which it is not. The Self is not what we think it to be. It is to be distinguished from

the body, the senses, the vital force, mind, understanding, and the ego-sense. All these are phenomenal products of *Prakriti* or *Māyā*, the cosmic energy, which is non-spiritual in character. The Self, however, is not a product of this energy. Through ignorance, which has no beginning, it identifies itself with the phenomenal products of *Prakriti* and falsely attributes to itself the experiences which really belong to the body etc. *Mukti*, for all practical purposes, therefore means the realization of the Self as other than the body, the senses, etc.

Whether this realization necessarily means the knowledge of one's Self as the non-dual, sole Reality, or as an atomic spirit which is a servant and, or, lover of God, depends on our conception of the supreme Reality. To the dualistic schools, self-knowledge means its realization as a servant and, or, lover of God, the supreme Self, because the very nature of the individual self is such. And that is why they include the idea of *bhakti* in the very concept of *mukti*. But the entry into a relationship of devotion and service to God is not possible, unless the Self is known as different from all products of *Prakriti* and as noumenal. Thus we can say that the realization of the Self as different from the phenomenal principles of not-self is the essence of *mukti*.

Grace of God and salvation

Perhaps this is the place to mention briefly that the grace of God is indispensable

for *mukti* according to all schools of Hinduism, except Sāmkhya-Yoga and the Shankara school of Vedānta. Even for the latter, grace has a part to play in the final emancipation. Some schools like Bengal Vaiṣṇavism believe that, while deliverance from the mistaken identity of the Self with the not-self may be possible without the grace of God, for *mukti* proper one needs it. This is so because *mukti* for this school means the realization of the self as dependent on God and as naturally subject to His control and as loving Him. This involves relationship with the Divine, entry into which will be possible only through His loving grace. In Kashmir Shaivism, which is absolutistic in character, the role of grace is admitted, but in a different sense. In this system, the individual self is only a wilful self-limitation of the Absolute, and for the realization through recognition of itself as the Absolute, an action of the Absolute as conscious Power is necessary. It is not possible to elaborate on this point here. Suffice it to say that the idea of grace is well known in Indian religious philosophy. Indeed the Upanishads state that the Divine reveals His form to him whom He has chosen.

Salvation means 'to be saved'. From what is man to be saved? He is to be saved from the peril of the displeasure of God. Through his disobedience of God's will, man has roused God's wrath against himself. He has committed the sin of flouting God's command the wage of which is death. Man has lost the favour and grace of God and has been driven out of God's fellowship. Now, to be admitted again into His fellowship, to be saved from the stage of death or disunion with God, is to attain salvation. And, since there is no inherent power in man to regain the lost favour of God, it is only the Divine's redeeming love that can wash away man's sin and bestow upon him salvation as a gift. Through repentance for his sin and the turning of the soul to God, man can receive

the saving power of God and thus be saved.

The Hindu and Christian ideas of the soul

This seems to come near the idea of *mukti* according to the dualistic schools of the Vedānta and Shaivism and Shāktism. But when we analyse the concept of the soul in Christianity, we see the vast difference between the Christian and the Hindu ideas. The soul, according to Christianity, is the seat and, or, the unity of thinking, feeling, and willing. Intelligence, the moral capacity for self-control, the idea of personality, the ability to turn towards God and know Him, these distinguish man from animal. While the soul is distinct from the material body, it is not other than what is now called the mind, which carries on the functions of thinking, feeling, and willing. Thus the soul in Christianity is not the same as that which is called the Self (Ātman) in Hinduism. Though both are described as spiritual, the term 'spirit' does not convey the same idea in the context of Christianity and Hinduism. First, Ātman or *Cit* in Hinduism is uncreated and an eternal verity. The soul in Christianity is a created substance and can, in theory at least, be destroyed. It is true that the soul is said to be immortal, but it only means that it does not suffer from the disintegration that material things are subject to. It is not that God intends to destroy the souls He has Himself created. Nevertheless, the soul is not indestructible in principle.

The Self in Hinduism is of the same nature as God. Even if the Self is not taken to be the sole Reality, the individual self and the supreme Self have the same kind of being. In Christianity, not only is the soul incapable of attaining identity with God, it is also not of the same essence as that of God. It is true that God is Reason, and that the highest faculty of man is also reason. But the use of the term 'reason' in connection with God is analogical, and God's reason or God as Reason is not reason as we know it in

man. The soul is said to be spiritual, in so far as it is not sensuous, is intellectual, and can have universal ideas. This, however, corresponds to *buddhi* of Indian psychology and, as such, falls short of the concept of *Cit*, which is Self in essence and which is inherently conscious, if not Consciousness itself. In fact, it is both at the same time, and does not need any help from the intellect when it is free from the limitations put on it by its association with the phenomenal things. And the difference between Ātman and the soul has its bearing on the concepts of *mukti* and salvation.

Because sin is the disobedience of God's will, salvation requires the correction of the wayward will of man from being an instrument of self-assertion to that of submission to God's will. Bondage, however, in Hinduism is the result of ignorance and not due primarily to defection of will. That is why, though in the spiritual discipline in Hinduism the seeker has to surrender his personal will to that of God, this training of the will must culminate in knowledge of the Self, because without such knowledge the chains of bondage cannot be broken.

The Hindu discipline

The turning of the faculties of man to God, the dedication of the soul to the Divine, is what man can and must do to receive the Spirit or God as the saving power functioning in man. But these faculties are born of *Prakriti*, according to Hindu terminology, and do not belong to *Cit* as such. True, in the dualistic schools the self is regarded as the knower, enjoyer, and doer. But these functions of the *Cit* are inherent in it as said above. The self, for example, knows God, enjoys His love and loving Him, and serves and waits on Him without any assistance from the mental intelligence, the emotions of the heart, and will as we know it. In other words, the cognitive, affective, and the conative functions of the Ātman are not the same as those of the faculties of man

in bondage. Now, before the Self can be realized as *Cit*, intelligence, emotions, and will have to be turned towards God, either singly or collectively. Even the Shankarites admit the necessity for this turning, making the appearance of the impersonal Absolute as personal God its object. At any rate, the purification of the intelligence, the centring of the emotions in the Divine, and the surrender of the personal will to God's will are indispensable.

This is a moral and religious training, which prepares man for the proper spiritual realization, which is a direct experience of the nature of the Self either as the non-dual, sole Reality (as in Shankara), or as an individual spirit unrelated to God and *Prakriti* (as in Sāmkhya-Yoga), or as liberated from association with phenomenal things but united with God (as in the dualistic schools of Vaishnavism, Shaivism, and Śāktism), or as the non-dual Reality which has become everything and with which it has a dynamic identity (as in Kashmir Shaivism and Sri Aurobindo).

The Christian discipline

In none of these realizations is *Cit* conceived to be like what is called the soul in Christianity. The Christian discipline would appear to be what Hindu philosophers would call *sāttvika* and not properly spiritual, which would involve training for knowledge of the Self, as distinct from that to which morality is relevant and necessary, even ultimately. It is religious in the sense that it needs contact with God to perfect it, but here, again, the contact is not a part of the realization. The liberated man's devotion to God is not a discipline, but an achievement. The Christian moral discipline is a high and noble one with a refined religious touch, in so far as there is in it a conscious attempt to unite with God.

Christianity lays great stress on forgiveness of those who trespass against us. The positive aspect of this attitude of forgiveness is love. No doubt, it is a very

important discipline for the spiritual life. But the Self in Hinduism does not, by its very nature, bear any grudge against anyone. It is perfect and does not suffer from any moral defects. In the stage of bondage, man certainly has to develop forgiveness and love, but the Self, as such, is not in need of any such practice. In Christianity, the soul, before its *fall*, was completely submissive to God's will. But it is not certain what its attitude to love was, because the legend does not portray a community of souls. This is a difficult point in theology, and a discussion of this point will carry us far beyond the limits of our present topic. But I wish to make the point clear that the practice of love and charity is not necessary for the *ātman*, as it is for the soul. What happens, however, to the redeemed soul is not clear. Perhaps no soul has yet been saved, and will not be saved till the Day of Judgement.

Post-liberation individuality

Christianity does not envisage salvation as something to be attained by the soul only. When all people will be judged, those who will be acquitted will have their bodies restored somehow. At any rate, those souls will be embodied. Thus even in the state of salvation the soul is not disembodied. Christian writers consider it a defect of Hinduism that it should regard the highest spiritual value of life as involving a rejection of all connection with the physical body. But the reason for this rejection is the perception of the nature of the body, which is opposed to that of the Spirit. Christianity lacks the knowledge of the duality of the Spirit and the mind-life-body. It may be, indeed is, a defect of Hinduism that it fails to see the secret and essential spirituality of the body and the possibility of its overt spiritualization. But, in the process of the discovery of the basic pure Spirit, it is

necessary to cancel any essential connection of the Spirit with the body.

There is another point to be noted in this connection. Christian writers are not at all clear about the nature of the resurrected body of the acquitted soul. Will it be a physical body fit for habitation in this world? Or will it be made of some subtle material? And where will the saved soul live, in this world or in heaven? It is said that this world will be transformed into the kingdom of heaven. This, at least, implies that the resurrected body will not be the same in kind as the present human body is. Now, those schools in Hinduism which believe in post-liberation individuality and the relationship of love and service with God also believe that the liberated soul has a body made of some non-physical, subtle material which is free from the limitations and impurities of earthly matter. Thus the idea of *mukti* does not necessarily mean it is a disembodied state. While there is no connection with corruptible material body, the freed self puts on a new body of a different nature.

We do not intend to suggest that the Christian experience of salvation is not genuine, or that in salvation man does not come in close contact with God, because he is not of the same nature as God. A study of the Christian mystics will amply show that they lived very close to God and in a consciousness made holy by the presence of the Divine. Even if man does not enjoy the same essence or type of being as God, the Divine's infinite mercy and love can certainly admit into His exalted fellowship all people who seek a new life and aspire after God's communion. Still, as concepts, salvation falls short of the ideal of *mukti*, and we can fairly conclude that liberation presupposes the ideal of being saved and *mukti* is the culmination of salvation. ■

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