

The Concept of Redemption in Major Religions: An Archetypal Point of View

Dr. Binoj Mathew, Holy Trinity Ashram, Bela P.O., Kasaragod

Abstract: Redemption is a religious concept that refers to the process through which a person is brought from a condition of captivity, distress or sin to eventual well-being. The theme of redemption and liberation is central to the Semitic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) as well as the Indian religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism). When redemption as an archetype is explored, there is a universal pattern in all stories, events and experiences of redemption irrespective of religions. This pattern can be used in any literary works that deals with the theme of redemption. Redemption is a powerful and uplifting theme that acknowledges the human potential to be successful after having failed.

Key words: Pre-Redemptive Process, Redemptive Process, Pro-Redemptive Response, Counter-Redemptive Response and Post-Redemptive Process

I. INTRODUCTION

Redemption is a religious concept that refers to the process through which a person is brought from a condition of captivity, distress or sin to eventual well-being. The theme of redemption and liberation is central to the Semitic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) as well as the Indian religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism). According to the Bible, men and women were created in the image and likeness of God for an intimate relationship with the divine creator. This has been beautifully narrated in the creation of Adam and Eve in the book of the Genesis. Although they were in the image and likeness of God, they were given the freedom of choice. They were sent to the paradise with a free will. However man's irresponsible use of freedom resulted in rupture of that relationship with God. This was a permanent blot on every one born of woman. In order to bring them back and restore the state of grace, they were promised a redeemer. It is there the concept of redeemer and redemption originates in the Bible. Human beings were aspiring for this redemption. Jesus through his life, passion, death and resurrection brought back the grace that was lost. The relationship was restored. This would mean redemption is a process of being delivered from all crippling circumstances. It is of God's undertaking and man's doing. This is a progression of recovering the lost paradise and their primordial blissful state. It is a process of rediscovering the divine within. This process empowers the self to discover the beauty within and enable the self to relish the splendour in the self and the other, which would result in emancipation of the self and the other from all the distorted views.

II. CONCEPT OF REDMPTION IN THE MAJOR RELIGION

Redemption is a universal phenomenon and in order to establish this concept as a universal concept researcher deals with redemption in major religions as it is inevitable part of this work. A scientific study on redemption infers that all the major religions emphasize on the personal effort to experience redemption. There have been innumerable work on redemption in literature but this work endeavours to look at redemption as an archetype. Archetype falls under structuralism. It was challenged by postmodernists. They don't admit of a reference point. When there is no reference point we end up in meaninglessness and postmodernist outlook is irresponsible inclinations to view that everything in life from pure relativism. Archetypal criticism is to bring back a sense to the critical world the necessity for reason and logic.

When redemption as an archetype is explored, there is a universal pattern in all stories, events and experiences of redemption irrespective of religions. The question of redemption arises at a crisis, sin, captivity etc. In the long duration of history whenever there were trials, tribulations, bondages man has turned towards the power above in search of spiritual strength to help him continue life with ease and comfort. Though there had been a strong urge in man to experience redemption, the desires of the body and the

luxuries and comforts of the world had turned him away from God, people, himself and nature. The particular situation destroys the original beauty or status of his life. This points out to a need for redemption, a pre-redemptive process. When one is in a crisis, sin or captivity a voyage or an exile is essential to experience redemption. According to the Bible, the people of Israel were in captivity and they had to make an exodus to come out of their slavery. At the face of a crisis, sin or captivity, there are two options before any individual or a group and they are either to enter into the process of redemption by making a pro-redemptive response or the other is to counter the redemptive process through a counter-redemptive response. A pro-redemptive response will lead one to experience redemption.

Religions advocate a few means to experience redemption but a personal choice is inevitable. St. Augustine stated that he, who created you without you, will not save you without you. St. Augustine who was leading an immoral life and later was converted indicated it through his own experience of recognizing redemption in his own personal life. Those who make a pro-redemptive response will then be lead to a post-redemptive process. This will have set the person free of captivity to begin to enjoy peace and life in its fullness. This is a process of rediscovering the divine within, a voyage to the original innocence of life.

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*, *Galut* 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.

III. THE CONCEPT OF REDEMPTION IN AN ARCHETYPAL PATTERN

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 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 through which he experiences redemption. Dimmesdale and Hester in *The Scarlet Letter* are paradigms of liberation and redemption and they become epitome of redemption through self awareness, self-acceptance, forgiveness and repentance.



Fig.1

This frame work can be used in the following novels like, Isaac Bashevis Singer's *The Slave* and U.R. Ananthamurthy's *Samskara*. The interesting observation is that Nathaniel Hawthorne is a Puritan; Graham Greene, a Catholic; Isaac Bashevis Singer, a Jew and U.R. Ananthamurthy is an Indian Brahmin. Since they belong to different religions, their conceptual framework of Semitic and Indian religions is discussed not only with respect to redemption but also in terms of the meaning of life. Dimmesdale and Praneshacharya are outstanding witness of Puritanism and Brahminism respectively. They have wisdom of their scriptures. Hence, they are cut off from the commonality of a natural human being. The whisky priest is a follower of Catholicism and Jacob, representative of Judaism. Jacob and Pranesh are already married and Dimmesdale and the wishky priest are unmarried pastors. All of them share a common frailty - more specifically sexual frailty. They are caught up with guilt but in their own way they all work on redemption. Dimmesdale and the whiskey priest attain redemption through their repentance and confession. Praneshacharya confronted his nothingness with tremendous intensity and that led him to the path of fulfilment of his life's quest. Jacob through

his decision to take Wanda with him as his wife, he experiences redemption. Sin, captivity or distress is part of human life. When they fall prey to these negative experiences, they undergo mental tortures, social stigmas and self-imposed penance according to the background of their religions. These experiences lead them to growth and change. This ends up in a condition of well-being in the novels. In all the novels mentioned above there was a crisis which called for pre-redemptive process. There were two options in the crisis either to make a pro-redemptive response or counter-redemptive response (guilt, psychological discrepancies, hatred etc). When the former is positive and entrance into the redemptive process, the latter is negative. The protagonists make a pro-redemptive response and enter into the redemptive process. They become aware of their own situation (self-awareness); accept the situation (self-acceptance); forgive themselves and others who have been causes (forgiveness) and repent of their ways (repentance). This leads them to the post-redemptive process. They enjoy peace, fullness of life, *Malkhut shamayim*, paradise, *mukti*, *moksa*, *samadhi*, *nirvana*. This has been proved through all the novels and this pattern can be used in any literary works that deals with the theme of redemption. Redemption is a powerful and uplifting theme that acknowledges the human potential to be successful after having failed. Theological understandings of it focus on how humans can restore their relationships with God, society, nature and themselves despite having fallen from grace into sin. Literature takes the same theme of brokenness and rejuvenation and places it in the context of life on earth, thus including understandings of redemption that may stray from those theologically defined. In this way, even 'secular' literatures can be seen as doing 'theological' work. Therefore we can say that the concept of redemption in secular religions is a solution to scattered images of the self and the other and it brings about restoration and integration in the self and in the other.

IV. CONCLUSION

The process of redemption is the same in the religions. 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 of redemption is same in all the religions but the means are different. This same framework can be used to explore the concept of redemptions in the literature from an archetypal point of view.

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