

The Concept of Moksa in three Major Religious Thoughts (of Indian Tradition)

Dr. Charulata Das

Lecturer in Philosophy

U.N. (A) College, Adaspur, Odisha

Email: mamicharu.unc@gmail.com

Abstract

Moksa or mukti is a post-Vedic concept. In the Upanisads there has been emphasis on sanyasa dharma which has similarity with the aspiration of moksa state but cannot be equalized with it. However, subsequently in three major religious traditions of India, namely, Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism there have been conspicuous emphasis on the concept of moksa as a liberative concept. The aim of this paper is to expose and analysis of their views.

Keywords

sanyasa dharma, God realization

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Dr. Charulata Das

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The concept of *moksa* or *mukti* is found to be used in the Indian tradition as a liberative concept in the post-Vedic days. In the system building period the two terms (*moksa* and *mukti*) are used synonymously referring to a special and higher state of attainment. It appears that during the early period of the Vedic and Upanisadic days such liberative concept was not conceived. There was the common urge for the attainment of *svarga* which was supposed to be higher aim of the humans. During those days the pair of concepts like, *svarga* (heaven) and *narka* (hell) were found to be referring to best and worst state of attainment respectively. At that time the highest state of attainment was consisting in the attainment of *svarga*. It is because the general supposition was there are three *lokas* (worlds) meant for three categories, namely, *devas* (gods), *manavas* (humans) and *danavas* (demons). The three worlds are found to be named as *svarga*, *martya* or *prthivi*, and *paataala*. *Svarga praapti* was supposed to be the higher state of aspiration for everyone as it is such a place where the limitations of *prthivi* are supposed to be absent. It may be thought that instead of direct emphasis on *moksa* there was emphasis on *sanyasa dharma* of the *asrama dharmas* in the Upanisads. It is state of total renunciation of giving up all desires. It has the similarity with the state of aspiration for *moksa*. But the understanding was that by ‘giving up desires and detachment from material allurements’ in the *sanyasa* state it was considered as preparation for higher state of attainment of freedom and getting free from rebirth.

While thinking about the post-Upanisadic view concerning liberation, it is seen that the Charvakas and the Ajivakas, who are materialists, do not believe in any idea of liberation. They maintain that there is nothing which can be considered as immortal. According to them death is the end of life and liberation means death. There is no rebirth or the continuity of the soul. Soul is consciousness of the body. Except the Charvakas and the Ajivakas we find that all the other systems whether heterodox or orthodox aimed at some kind of higher state. But the dominating religions of the period were found to be very much acceptive of the liberative state in some way or other. Here the brief account of the views of the three major religions of Indian tradition, namely, Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism are taken into consideration.

So far as the view of Hinduism is concerned, keeping the vastness of its literatures in mind, the view of the three major texts of the religion, namely, *Mahabharata*, *Srimad Bhagavadgita* and *Srimad Bhagavatam*, will be taken into account. There has been specific mentioning of the four fold classifications of the cardinal values in the *Mahabharata*¹ which shows that the concept of *moksa* is already there during the period of the text. Both the later texts are most revered and

popular texts belonging to same period. They also share almost the similar stand in respect of the status and means of liberation. Mostly it is taken for granted that God-realisation, God's grace and self-surrender before God are essential factors in obtaining salvation. It is as good as liberation. In this context Prabhupada's presentation in respect of the two above mentioned texts is quite remarkable and it runs like the following:

“*Bhagavad-gītā* was spoken to liberate one from the bodily conception of life, and Arjuna put himself in this position in order to receive this information from the Lord. One must become free from the bodily conception of life; that is the preliminary activity for the transcendentalist. One who wants to become free, who wants to become liberated, must first of all learn that he is not this material body. Mukti, or liberation, means freedom from material consciousness. In the *Śrīmad-Bhagavatam* also the definition of liberation is given. *Muktirhitvānyathā-rūpaA svarūpeGa vyavasthitih: mukti* means liberation from the contaminated consciousness of this material world and situation in pure consciousness. All the instructions of *Bhagavad-gītā* are intended to awaken this pure consciousness, and therefore we find at the last stage of the *Gītā*'s instructions that Kṛṣṇa is asking Arjuna whether he is now in purified consciousness.”²²

There cannot be any doubt that the above mentioned three sources are having strong theological leanings and for liberation detachment from social and material concerns and attachment with getting nearer to God through religious practices happen to be primary concerns. Such theological leanings are not expected with the two prevailing heterodox trends of Jainism and Buddhism. Let us have a look on the view of liberation shared by these two unorthodox systems.

Concept of Liberation in Jainism

In the framework of Jaina doctrine of liberation two concepts, ‘suffering’ and ‘happiness’ have very significant role. Had there been no sufferings and aspiration for the state of permanent happiness, there would not have been any need for liberation. It is because prior to liberation man is in suffering and after liberation he has the state of happiness. Jainas have considered that the *jivas* are suffering individuals who are in bondage state. The soul he shares is inherently perfect. But with the association of body he is exposed to various passions like anger, pride, greed, infatuation, etc. In order to expel the sufferings the individual can remove the obstacles and the *jiva* can achieve perfection.

The Jainas have the faith on the rebirth principle basing on the actions performed by the individual. So for their liberation the concept of karma has an important role to play. The forging of the fetter of *karma* takes place in two stages:

certain psychical conditions like ignorance of the ultimate truth and passion lead to the movement of contagious *karmic* matter towards the *jiva*. That is *Asrava*. Then there is the actual influx of infiltration of *karma* fetter which is known as *bandha*. The falling away of the *karma* is also thought of in two stages. First through right knowledge and self-restraint, the influx of fresh *karma* is stopped. It is *samvara*. Then the shedding of *karma* takes place. That is *nirjara* which will result of itself after *samvara*. The ultimate result therefore is *moksa* when the partnership between *jiva* and matter is dissolved and the ideal character is restored to *jiva*. It is said:

“*Asravobhavahetuhsyaat samvavo moksa kaaranam*”.

In this way the liberated *jiva* transcends the *samsaara* and proceeds to its permanent abode, *Lokaakaasa*. The process of liberation starts with the *karma* and proceeds with a disciplined life by the help of the *triratnas* (three jewels) to reach at the end point. Right faith, right knowledge and right conduct are the crucial for the path of *moksa*. Jaina scholar, Umaswami has mentioned this in the following words: ‘*Samyag darshana-jnaana- charitraani moksa maargah.*’

Thus in the Jaina system it is accepted that when the *jiva* is free from obstacles by the attainment of infinite knowledge, infinite power, and infinite bliss the liberation (*mukti*) is attended. When the *jiva* becomes free from all kinds of bondage, the *jiva* attains the four fold perfections (*anata-catustaya*), namely, infinite knowledge, infinite faith, infinite power and infinite bliss. The end of the attainment of *mukti* is the state of absolute omniscience (*kevala-jnāna*). The state of *mukti* is the state where the soul is in pure happiness. The *jina-hood* is attended by the Tirthankaras who are for them the liberated beings and have full control over their passions. The emphasis on right knowledge and right character is quite conspicuous in the Jaina tradition. So it is quite obvious that in their frame the concept of *mukti* is rooted in both metaphysical and ethical foundations. They have not made it explicit regarding the two stages of liberation but that they have accepted the possibility of attainment of *mukti* in the state of alive. It is quite evident from their explanation of the state of attainment of *mukti* that *karma* and disciplined life leads to the state of *keval-jnana* which can be treated as the state of enlightenment in living state. When the enlightened being becomes free from his physical body the *mukta* soul finds its abode, *lokaakaasa*. The concept of *lokaakasa* is no less other-worldly like the concept of heaven of some of the Hindu literatures.

In the *Dravya Sangarha* it has been said that Jainas are atheistic and have not accepted God. But they are not away from the activities like prayer, worship, etc. For their guidance in the attainment of knowledge and liberation they were offering worships and prayer to the liberated souls or *Tirthankaras*. In this context

Puligandla says that “It deserves to be emphasized that the motive behind such prayers and worship is neither to seek mercy and forgiveness nor to indulge in self-deprecation and confession of guilt, as is so often the case with the followers of theistic religions. Given the Jaina doctrines of thoroughgoing atheism and the autonomous character of the law of *karma*, each man has to attain freedom and perfection by his own efforts and cannot expect to be saved by others, not even by the *TirthaAkaras*. That is. Each man must work out his own salvation.”³ Thus Jainism is a system where it is expected that man should be courageous to rely on his own effort without waiting for the grace of some unseen power. The existing *Tirthamkaras* are the source of inspirations, not grace.

The Buddhist concept of liberation

The Buddhist concept of liberation is known as *nirvana*. Like Jainism ‘suffering’ is also important factor in the context of the state of release or liberation. It is the state which is considered as the cessation of sufferings. Buddhism holds the view that the life continues with a series of birth and rebirth. The liberation possible when there is end to the birth rebirth series. It means in case of liberation there would be no rebirth. For them death is not end of life. Rather death is a beginning of another life. In this context they have talked about the life cycle or *jeevana chakra* or the *janma-marana-chakra* by the help of twelve links (*nidaanas*), out of which the first two are related to the past life, the last two are related to the future life and the rest eight are concerned with the present life. The birth and rebirth series is there because of the ignorance. The life is considered as the product of our continued ignorance. The *karmas* of the present life are determinant of the possibility of next life. They hold that, desire is the main cause of sorrows and sufferings. Our life is full of desires. When the desires can be suspended, there is perfect control over the passions and the perfect knowledge of *pratitya samutpada* is obtained one can be free from rebirth possibility and attains the nirvana. So the presence of desires is ignorance and absence of the desires leads towards the right knowledge.

The knowledge of the *pratitya samutpada* is the right knowledge. Without this right knowledge the individual being is in bondage and ignorance. The right knowledge can dispel the ignorance and can bring an end to birth rebirth series. This will lead to the state of liberation or *nirvana*. Nirvana is understood as the state of blowing out. It means the extinction of all kinds of misery. A liberated being is completely free from all kinds of bondage and attachments. He is free from desires and passions. He is known as Boddhisattva. He has perfect knowledge, perfect peace and perfect wisdom.⁴ Here the being is beyond the enjoyment of the worldly pleasures. He enjoys perfect peace, serenity, equanimity, etc. So *nirvana* cannot be explained

through common experiences. It is a state of realization. In Jaina system the liberated soul proceeds to *lokaakaasa*. Buddha was silent to the question whether the liberated one ceases to exist after *nirvana*. Very possibly he did not like to answer the question as there is no acceptance of soul and the inappropriateness of the question. Talking about the future existence of something which has completely extinguished would lead to contradiction.

Puligandla points out that some scholars⁵ have raised the issue that being free from pleasure and pain a liberated one spends his rest life in inactivity and indifference to world. But the very simple fact of Buddha's life after enlightenment is a simple answer to the question raised by Hackmann and similar others. In the language of Puligandla "The man who attains *nirvāṇa* is a man of knowledge, discipline, and non-attachment. As a man of perfect wisdom, he desires nothing for himself but always works for the well-being and liberation of his fellowmen."⁶ Bodhisattva is supposed to live the rest of his life engaging himself in offering service to the mankind. He has to take initiative to remove the ignorance of others.

In this Buddhist frame the ethical foundation is also quite clear along with its metaphysical foundation. In the explanation of process of liberation their metaphysical stand is seen to be very much supportive and foundational. Further the purpose behind their aspiring for liberation is no doubt ethical. So it is clear that in the Buddhist frame liberation is founded both on the metaphysical and ethical grounds.

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