“Śīla, Samādhi, and Prajñā: A paradigm for understanding Indian religious philosophy and Christianity.”

**General Introduction:**

From time immemorial human beings have developed psychologically, intellectually, emotionally, socially, and spiritually in different places, societies, cultures, civilizations, and geographical situations in the world. Every society and culture is similar to and different from others. In the same vein, every individual is considered to be unique yet there are certain things that all share in common which is nothing else but the final end and goodness in life. There are metaphysical, epistemological, and ontological differences among various philosophical systems. There is nonetheless, a common pool of resources from which to share with each other the code of conduct, meditation, and insight. This trio of religious life is found in some form or the other in atheistic sects like Jainism, Buddhism and in secular sect like Yoga as well as in theistic sects such as Kevaladvaita and Non-kevaladvaita systems of Vedānta.

The path prescribed for attainment of final goal by all the systems includes the practice of the moral principles. However, these systems present the above principles as the objects of recommendation rather than commands. But these principles could become obligatory when subjected to the faith, inclination or commitment of the agents themselves.

The final goal of life *mokṣa* or *nibbāna* in Indian systems sounds similar but the process and meaning of final goal in each school differs. In Buddhism it can be interpreted as the absence of suffering and annihilation of passions. In Jainism *mokṣa* can be understood as freedom of soul from *Kārmic* particles by subsidence of them through *samvara* and *nīrjara*. In Yoga it could be understood as an establishment of pure soul (*Puruṣa*), free from *Prakṛti* modifications. In Kevalādvaita it can be seen in the form of complete union of soul with Brahman who is the same, free from *maya* or ignorance. In
Non-kevaladvaita systems of Vedānta in general it can be understood as closeness with the divine being through faith and devotion. In Christianity, too it can be understood as closeness with divine through the right efforts, faith, and devotion to God.

By applying the threefold model of code of conduct, meditation, and insight, an attempt is made in this thesis to look forward to understand Christianity as a religion, which deals elaborately with morality (ethics), wisdom, meditation and contemplation. In Christianity, salvation or the Kingdom is the goal of life and to attain that goal morality, ethics, and purity at all levels is sought. Since, Christianity is God-centric religion, faith in God’s grace, mercy, and forgiveness becomes essential to experience His love and the Kingdom. In Christianity like other religions, the code of conduct is present, but the concepts of love of God, love of neighbor, and even love towards one’s enemies are at the core of the ethics or code of conduct. In Christian tradition, the whole code of conduct is summarized in the concept love and charity.

Buddhism is a system where there is no concept of metaphysical substance such as God and the soul, everything is momentary and world is full of suffering. It is different from other systems. Owing to confusion one might ask, what is there to experience in nībbāṇa? Here, one may see the difference at the level of metaphysical reality but one needs to understand practical and psychological aspect of Buddhism through the code of conduct, meditation, and insight.

One may find the concept of soul in Jainism but neither God and nor His grace as they are presented in theistic systems. The code of conduct also is practiced in extreme form. Here, knowledge has instrumental value rather than intrinsic one.

In Yoga system there is concept of soul and God but God in Yoga is treated just as an object of meditation and not as the Supreme Being or creator. The whole combination of code of conduct, meditation, and insight is secular and psycho-spiritual.

In Kevalādvaita of Śaṅkarācārya the concept of soul and Brahman is present but conventional world in which we live is māyā and absoluteness of Brahman is everything. Here, seeing the concept of absoluteness of Brahman, and knowledge of Brahman being the ultimate goal, one may ask as to the use of code of conduct and meditation. The Brahman who is absolute is a metaphysical reality and knowledge is intrinsic to it but at
the practical level, one needs the above-mentioned concepts of code of conduct and meditation.

In Non-Kevalādvaita the faith aspect has been emphasized and God and His grace become important at all levels practically in all (Rāmānujācārya, Nimbārkācārya, Vallabhācārya, and Madhvacārya). One might ask here, what is the place of code of conduct, meditation, and knowledge if everything depends on the will of God? Once again here too the process of liberation is not one sided as God’s grace or human effort alone. Therefore human effort in different forms of code of conduct, meditation, and knowledge along with God’s grace becomes essential.

The concept of meditation and contemplation is present in Christianity and they sound similar to Indian systems at practical levels, differ due to faith and principles. Largely, it is similar to Non-Kevalādvaita which is based on faith in God and His grace. The concept of knowledge or wisdom is present in Christianity not as an immediate effect of meditation but as a gift of the divine. Once again, the wisdom or knowledge is not direct cause of liberation. It is the grace of God, which is given according to the will of God and not as the result of human effort.

Some of these religious systems are intoxicated by faith whereas others by doctrine of *karma* and psychology and even when they come to the same platform in the name of faith, still there are differences because some have faith in Scriptures whereas others may believe in God and his grace. Some religious systems give importance to knowledge as a means of liberation, whereas others highlight *bhakti* and *karma*. Ordinarily, one may find many similarities. Thus, they seem to stand on the same platform. However, beauty is not found in similarities but in differences. Hence, an effort is made to see and observe them comparatively from different points of views and finally to understand and appreciate their uniqueness.

In the course of dealing with the above-mentioned three aspects *Śīla, samādhi*, and *Prajñā* in relation to different systems one may ask a question as to why these three Buddhist concepts have been taken. They are abstracted from Buddhism as a minimalistic model for religious life. However, they can assume different interpretations and different manifestations in respective systems.
The main aim and objective of this thesis is to promote better understanding of Code of Conduct, Meditation, and Insight in all the above mentioned religious systems and set a common stage for dialogue through which people of different faiths may care, share, and celebrate life together in perfect peace and harmony. Here due to various limitations I restrict myself only to the above-mentioned religious systems. This is only to say that there is an ample scope of developing the topic in relation to other religious systems of the world.

Here, an attempt is being made to understand the three concepts in above-mentioned systems where there can be similar concepts and applications but the term in each system may differ and slightly even in meaning. For example, Šīla in Buddhism is the code of conduct where as in other system the same term may not be used but once again the term which referred to as the code of conduct can be used and compared with Šīla. For example, Yamas and niyamas in Yoga used as code of conduct. Thus, it is being compared with Šīla or code of conduct of other systems.

The study consists of seven chapters in which general introduction and conclusion are not taken as chapters. From chapter one to six, each chapter consists of three parts of Šīla, samādhi, and Prajñā respectively, besides introduction and conclusion of each one. The seventh chapter would be a comparative explanation of all schools.