

# ‘God, Man and Satan’: A study with reference to the Bible and John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

Mini C. P

Research Scholar, Jiwaji University, Gwalior. (M.P)

## INTRODUCTION

John Milton, in his famous epic poem *The Paradise Lost* has woven the fabric of social structure, reformatory zeal of religiosity, some definitive suggestions to the Christian mode of thinking and the presentation of a grand and sublime style in the composition of this epic. As a poet of high repute in English literature he is regarded reverentially by all sections and by all academicians, no matter where they hail from. He has not left untouched any of the religious themes in his famous epic. Some of the prominent concepts that found expression in his renowned epic are God, Man and Satan, which have a direct bearing on the Holy Bible.

### The concept of God in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*:

In *Paradise Lost* Milton depicts vividly his distinct concepts on God, Man and Satan and presents it very palatably to the readers to savour analytically with the mind of a literary critique. Milton agrees with almost all Reformed thinkers of seventeenth century when it comes to description on God and His essential attributes like immensity, infinity, eternality, immutability, omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, oneness, and his departure from orthodoxy generally begins from this common ground. One can make certain claims about God, but transforming those claims into plausible of how it all actually works, turns out to be more difficult a task. Milton has found ways and means to do this herculean task to its best possibility especially in reference to the Biblical concept of God. The preface to ‘*History of the Perfect-Cursed-Blessed Man*’ by Joseph Fletcher unfolds a theological treatise in miniature, covering a number of topics with special attention to the Fall and Redemption, where their point of departure is a discussion of the infinite and Eternal God and his relationship to our finite temporal world. (Joseph Fletcher, *History of the Perfect-Cursed-Blessed Man*)

We come across different portraits of God in the Bible. In the book of *Genesis*, we encounter a God who is called *Elohim* in Hebrew meaning ‘Majesty’. He forms man out of ‘dust’ of the earth and interacts with him, walking with him in the cool of the Garden. Here the relationship between God and man is very cordial and warm, intimate and tender. Ever since man sinned and separated himself from God he seems to prefer to relate to humans through the angels and messengers. We come across God as a ‘fierce and consuming fire’ when he commands the Israelites under the leadership of Joshua to burn and destroy the city and everything in it, in the process of conquest and settlement of the Israelites in the Promised Land. (Joshua, 6: 20-24) In the exodus journey of Israelites, a punishing God is visibly present as he is portrayed as quick to punish the offenders with instant death and dire consequences. In the book of Lamentations God is addressed personally, saying, “You have slain them in the day of your anger”. As we read carefully the Scripture, we get to know different attributes and images of God the Creator. Some of the attributes that can be traced about God in the Bible are “Gracious and compassionate” (2 chronicle,30:9), “Mighty” and “Exalted in Power” (Job,36:22), “A Righteous Judge” (Psalm, 7 :11), “My salvation” (Isiah, 12 :2), “Just” (2 thessalonians,1:6), “Light” (1John, 1:5), “Love” (1 Jon, 4:8) etc. As we come to know God in Scripture, we begin to understand the complex nature of a just, holy and righteous God who knows even our innermost thoughts and all our frailties and in spite of it he decides to sacrifice his Son that we may live and be saved. Such a God is immensely loving and unfathomable mercy. So Biblical God is a God of infinite Holiness, of profound Justice and of fathomless depth.

According to Miltonian concept of God, the Divine has an eternity which means existence of God beyond time. God is both the *Alpha and the Omega*, the beginning and the end, the first and the last, the origin from which everything sprung and the end towards which everything turns. The Calvinist systematic Theologian William Ames argues that our understanding of divine action is a convenient illusion: “No composition or change of power and act can have a place in the very simple and immutable nature God. But it adds to God a certain relation of a real effect.” Milton’s concept of God is a perfect being without any weakness, embodies pure reason and is always just.

“But let him boast,  
His knowledge of Good lost and Evil got,  
Happier, had sufficed him to have known  
Good by itself, and evil not at all.” (PL: 11,87-90)

In Miltonic depiction of God in *Paradise Lost*, it is indeed his ‘eternality’ that distinguishes the Father from the Son and the rest of creation.

Milton in his essay into systematic theology, *De Doctrina Christiana* seems to suggest that God who is timeless acts in proper time for man. The Aristotelian concept that time is a function of motion or change, finds expression in *Paradise Lost*.

“For time, though in eternity, applied,  
To motion, measures all things durable,  
By present, past and future.”

Though Milton seems unwilling to exempt God from the laws of Aristotelian time, he is hardly more eager to abandon the view that God is uniquely timeless. Milton seems to be in acceptance of the contrary point that God who is eternally timeless, acts or intervenes in time, in the life of humans. Milton in *Paradise Lost* tries to answer the question as to how God can be a truly infinite, eternal and immutable being and also one who enters meaningfully into our finite, temporal world. Milton writes in his religious work *De Doctrina Christiana*, “Admittedly God is always described or outlined not as he really is but in such a way as will make him conceivable to us. Nevertheless, we ought to form just such a mental image of him as he, in bringing himself within the limits of our undertaking, wishes to form.” (*De Doctrina Christiana*, 6:133.)

Descriptions of God like this one in angelic hymn in book 3, typically frame themselves in decidedly negative terms:

*“Immutable, immortal, infinite.  
Eternal king, thee author of all being,  
Fountain of light thyself invisible  
Amidst the glorious brightness where thou sits’t  
Throned inaccessible.”* (P.L 3:373-377)

A reference to early modern religious narrative poem can be traced in the above lines where assiduous avoidance of direct representation of God and description of him in deliberate opaque language are seen. Milton’s own drafts for a tragedy on the subject of *Paradise Lost* have an allegorical bent, with figures such as ‘Justice and Mercy’ standing for God and his exchange of tragedy for epic coincided with a shift from allegorical to literal representation of divinity. In short, we can definitely say that John Milton is very much influenced by the Biblical concept of God in his presentation of the *Paradise Lost*. Milton’s God cannot die, he cannot change as he is immutable, though he shows him to be speaking and acting. God is the metaphysical precondition for the existence of eternity.

#### **The concept of Man in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*:**

The concept of Man (Human Being) is one of the most debated topics ever since the human existence. It has been a topic of deliberations both in Philosophical and religious circles. It is because, the very concept functions like a boundary that guides the very life and activities of every human being. The Holy Bible defines Man as being created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26). In its broader sense Milton does accept this concept of Human being created in the image and likeness of God in terms of its universality. The entire scripture of the whole world, is meant to give direction and guidance to man, to enable him to lead a holy and blameless life before the concept of God, whichever religion it might be. It implies that God has ownership over us and that human beings have a bounden duty to obey his commands and live our lives worthy of him.

Man in the Bible is depicted as resemblance of God the Father as he is believed to have been fashioned in the image and likeness of God according to the Genesis account of creation, chapters one and two, in the Holy Bible. “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So, God created man in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis:1:26-27). For the sake of Man, everything else was created and put in place and God commissioned him to be in charge of tilling and keeping the earth, while giving authority to him over all the creatures of the earth, land and sky. So, among all the livestock of the universe, man is said to be the crown of creation in whom the Creator delights. God blessed the human beings he created and commissioned them to be partakers of co- creation, and thus multiply and fill the earth. God wanted human beings to share the responsibility of leadership in maintaining the status of his earthly kingdom to match it to his divine abode. There are plenteous images and verses in the Holy Bible which are attributed to explain the preciousness of man in the sight of God.

Milton’s *Paradise Lost* presents the purpose of God creating man as to make him a connecting link between heaven and earth. While narrating the purpose of God creating man and placing them in the Paradise, Arch angel Raphael

relates in *Paradise Lost* that after the rebellious angels were defeated, God wished to add a new creation so that no place in the universe would seem unpopulated by the absence of the fallen angels. This new creation would be human being in the image and likeness of God, so that through obedience to God's Will, man would ultimately unite earth with heaven, extending the reign of God. There is an undying aspiration and quest for more knowledge in humans that sometimes crosses the constraints, causing harm than good.

*Paradise Lost* presents Adam the first man with all his divine glory as image of God and so it blends well with the biblical image of man. The entire epic poem is centred around actions done to man by God on one side and also by Satan the other side. The central theme of *Paradise Lost* is to justify the ways of God to men. The decision of Adam and Eve at the temptation caused by Satan, to consume the 'forbidden fruit' of the Garden of Eden, proved fatal, forcing them out of the 'Paradise' in which God had placed them. Adam and Eve, the first human creation of God, stood for each other in life and death. They couldn't be otherwise, as an intimate relationship was established between them as Eve after all is, 'bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh'. When she transgresses and disobeys God, by the intrusion of Satan, Adam is also pulled in and they move towards death hand in hand. The Satanic trick endangers the paradise which was the result of free will granted by God himself, even to defy his own commandments. This takes us to the third concept, i.e Satan.

### **The concept of Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*:**

The idea of a devil or Satan existed from time immemorial and his role affected many cultural and religious patterns. Three major religions; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, have ideas of Satan that are historically and theologically connected with one another. Satan plays an important role in the Holy Bible and there are many narratives about him, his role, and his interaction with God and humans. In fact, according to the Holy Bible God actually created a powerful, intelligent, and beautiful angelic being called Lucifer what is now called Satan (meaning 'Shining One') – and that he was very good. However, the Satan also had a will with which he could freely choose. Like Adam he had the free will and he could accept God as God and had the possibility to defy God and declare himself as God. So, Satan wanted to defy and usurp the rule of the One omniscient and omnipotent Creator and revolted against the will of God. He is depicted as a 'fallen *Cherub* or angel, who was expelled from heaven at the beginning of time, before God created the material world, and is in constant opposition to God.

Accordingly, God the master Creator, after the expulsion of Satan and his angels out of heaven declared his desire and decision to give shape to another world and other creatures to dwell therein. He assigns this duty to his own Son and sends an army of angels along, to accomplish this work of creation within six days. This decision could be partly to erase the memory of rebellion in heaven waged by Satan and his rebel companions and also partly to make up for the rebel's absence from the ranks of God's loyal creation. Perhaps God did not want Satan to claim that he managed diminishing the number of creations through his rebellious act.

In Book IX of *Paradise Lost*, the Miltonic ideology emphasizes that God does not hinder the free will of humans. God being aware of the future course of actions of the human beings does not cause them to relent from going against his will. The burden of the responsibility of the fall from the Paradise is laid on the shoulders of Adam and Eve by the epic poet deliberately and then struggles hard to justify the ways of God to man. It is this free will that God gave to humans that left Eve free to go away from the presence of Adam and work alone, which soon turned out to be fatal, leading to the 'great fall' from the paradise. What must have led Eve and later Adam to go against the command of God was the misuse of the 'free will' that God gifted human being. Choices are plenty, before us. One needs to be prepared to face the consequence of one's decision on a day today basis. Milton believes that mankind possesses free will and he has the freedom or prerogative of choosing and directing his own destiny.

Milton portrays the Son, Man and Satan being capable of movement and transformation as revealed in the 'two falls' and the ascent of the Son to heaven. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan plays with language and applies a single word with multiple meanings or significations. This is the trick that he plays upon the new creation of God, specifically Eve. The first woman Eve gives into temptation, being mesmerised by the tactful words and ways of Satan. For example, the Satan forces Eve to believe that 'death' brings life and knowledge and in death a better and happier life is awaiting her. He makes her convinced that eating the fruit of the forbidden tree actually is the new opening to a world of realistic fantasy and that she would become like God knowing everything, good and evil. According to Milton, the tricky game changer of the life of Adam and Eve proved to be Satan, the fallen angel from heaven who took revenge on God by destroying his beautiful creation, Man. So, the *Paradise is lost* for both Satan and man simultaneously. Satan's and Adam's guilt is demonstrated dramatically in the epic poem.

*"The first sort by their suggestion fell,  
Self-tempted, self-depraved: Man falls deceived,  
By the other first: man, therefore shall find grace,  
The other none." (P.L 3,129-132)*

On hearing the flattery and exaggerated words of Satan, Eve is easily drawn into his treacherous envelop and is made to disobey God, though the action was committed by her free will. Satan here becomes a cause for the fall and he rejoices at his success in this endeavour which becomes evident in *Paradise Lost*.

*So saying, her rash hand in evil hour  
Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked. She ate:  
Earth felt the wound, and nature from her seat  
Sighing through all her works gave signs of woe...”*  
(P L, Book IX: 780-784)

However, it must be stated categorically that Milton in his poem, though brings the concept of Satan, nowhere diminishes the omnipotence of God. of course, the concept of free will to his creatures and the possibility of defying his commandment was part and parcel of his own Divine Design. By creating earth and mankind in a nearly empty part of the universe God shows the fallen angels that his glorious kingdom can be extended anywhere and indefinitely at his will. God decides to create the world and place human beings in it with the intention that earth and heaven will eventually be joined together as one kingdom through mankind's obedience to God's divine will.

## CONCLUSION

God, Man and Satan play a vital role in the text of *Paradise Lost* which borrows its plot from the book of Genesis, the first book of the *Holy Bible*. John Milton, as a poet has alluded the creation story effectively in his famous epic, while trying to highlight the socio-religious and political scenario of his time through the instrumentality of this epic throwing light and reflective thought on the readers. In fact, traces of the rise, fall and redemption of mankind as narrated in the Bible is categorically analysed in the text while also trying to draw home and expose the hypocritical socio-political and religious practises prevalent in his day. God, Man and Satan are three major concepts that run through the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, inter-weaving historic events and faith elements in the lives of individuals, society, tribes and nations. God, who is the creator of human beings, desires paradise to mankind and gives the best of everything as a free gift and lays responsibility on them to till and keep our common home and invites him to walk in the day light of his living presence, enjoying freedom of making decisions. Meanwhile Satan, the destroyer of mankind's integrity, actively continues to employ his tactful skills to entice the humans to sin and be away from the creator on a regular basis.

The presence of satanic temptations is depicted very vividly in the Bible even during the days of Jesus, the Redeemer of mankind. (Gospel of Luke Chapter 4) The mankind becomes the central point of action of both God and Satan, the former towards happiness and salvation of human kind while the latter towards its death and destruction. Human beings are constantly pulled toward two directions of good and evil. It is important that one should remain calm and open to discern the will of God, listen to the voice of one's conscience and act accordingly. Otherwise, there is a danger of being drawn toward evil, appearing in angelic form as happened with Eve in *Paradise Lost*. The consequences are unredeemable.

However, in Milton's *Paradise lost*, there are a number of problems that lend themselves more to the considerations of chronology, of actor, of cause and effect, than to the classificatory distinctions of methodical logic. The two Falls are good examples: It is difficult to explain in abstract terms how a good creature could fall without being pushed, how Satan and Adam could freely make decisions for which they are punished and so *Paradise Lost* attempts to understand them by reconstructing particular situations in which they might have occurred. Hence, the most famous epic poem, *Paradise Lost* is unparalleled in the history of literature. As a poet he makes the men responsible for all his actions when he loudly makes Satan say:

*“The mind is its own place, and in it self  
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.”*  
(*Paradise Lost* 1. 251-255)

And with these words Milton expresses universal elements in the epic *Paradise Lost*. That is why this epic is beneficial to all equally, irrespective of caste, creed, religion and nationality.

## REFERENCES

- [1]. Bremer, Francis J. *Puritanism: A very short introduction*, New York: Oxford university Press, 2009.
- [2]. Dryness, W, 1979 'Theme in Old Testament Theology: Paternoster Press.
- [3]. Joseph Fletcher, *History of the Perfect-Cursed-Blessed Man*, Nabu Press.
- [4]. Lewis, Clive's, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, London: Oxford University Press, 2008.

- [5]. Hinson DF, *Theology of the Old Testament: International Study Guide*, London, SPCK, 2001.
- [6]. Samuel Fallon, *Milton's strange God: Theology and Narrative Form in Paradise Lost*, The John's Hopkins University Press, 2012