

## Freedom: East and West

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**Abstract** This paper explains some of the uses of the word ‘freedom’ in Western as well as in Indian philosophy. Regarding the psychological concept of freedom or free will, this paper focuses on the distinction between fatalism, determinism, types of compatibilism, and libertarianism. Indian philosophers, by and large, are compatibilists, although some minor systems, such as Śākta Āgama, favor a type of libertarianism. From the Indian perspective the form of life of human beings has also been mentioned in the discussion of free will. Regarding metaphysical freedom, I discuss the views of the Bhagavad Gītā and Swami Vivekananda in Sect. III. K.C. Bhattacharyya, a neo-Advaita Vedāntin, has discussed degrees of freedom of the subject at several levels. According to him, spiritual progress lies in the progressive realization of the freedom of the subject. I compare his view with the classical Advaita concept of freedom. I have also addressed the question of whether freedom from suffering can be realized at social and global levels. In this context I have mentioned some of the interpretations of the great saying ‘I am Brahman,’ and how freedom can be realized at the global level by using the Advaita concept of ‘oneness.’

**Keywords** Fatalism · Determinism · Compatibilism · Soft determinism · Soft-soft determinism · Libertarianism · Advaita Vedānta · Spiritual freedom · *Bhagavad Gītā* · *Yogavāsīṣṭha* · *Ahaṁ Brahmāsmi* · Swami Vivekananda · K.C. Bhattacharyya

### Introduction

The aim of this paper is to discuss some of the uses of the word ‘freedom’ in the West as well as in the East. In the philosophy of mind, psychology, and ethics, the

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word 'freedom' usually refers to free will. Hence, I shall discuss whether human beings have free will. This discussion will lead us to the controversy between fatalism, determinism, compatibilism (soft determinism), and libertarianism. In this context I shall point out that most of the Indian philosophers have accepted compatibilism in psychology or philosophy of mind.

But in metaphysics, especially in the context of Indian metaphysics, 'freedom' means 'liberation from bondage.' Indian philosophers have used the word *mokṣa*, or *nirvāṇa*, to refer to the metaphysical concept of freedom. In spite of a range of meanings of the word *mokṣa* in different systems of Indian philosophy, all of them have accepted one cardinal meaning, namely, cessation of all types of suffering. Hence, I would like to mention the following three types of suffering discussed by all the major systems of Indian philosophy, such as Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vedānta, and Buddhism.

It is claimed that human beings are affected by sufferings that are due to body (*ādhibhautika*), sufferings due to natural disasters (*ādhidaiivika*), and sufferings due to mental conditions (*ādhyātmika*). Hence, the sufferings due to old age or disease will come under the *ādhibhautika* category. But the sufferings caused by global warming, floods, earthquake, tsunami, or climate change will come under the *ādhidaiivika* category. It is to be noted that climate change due to global warming is also caused by the actions of human beings. Hence, the term '*ādhidaiivika*' should not always be interpreted as natural disasters or acts of God. Sufferings, such as alienation, abandonment, loneliness, or anxiety, are considered mental or spiritual (*ādhyātmika*). These sufferings may also be due to certain thoughts, desires, or questions. Hence, in order to save mankind from total extinction or the world from total destruction, it is necessary to address the question of freedom at personal, social and global levels.

As regards the nature of metaphysical freedom, we come across several senses of the word '*mokṣa*' or '*nirvāṇa*' in systems of Indian philosophy. In this context, I shall discuss Swami Vivekananda's concept of freedom, as he claims that it can be realized here and now (or in this life). Professor Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya, a neo-Advaita Vedāntin, has discussed both the psychological concept of 'free will' and the metaphysical concept of 'freedom.' In this context, I shall focus on his concept of subject as freedom, as it cannot be described by any of our categories.

Indian philosophers, by and large, claim that freedom, or having 'free will,' is an essential property of human beings. In their psychology of action, knowledge or cognition plays a very important role. This is due to the fact that desire depends on cognition or knowledge, mental effort on desire, physical effort on mental effort, and action on physical effort.

As regards paths for the realization of the metaphysical freedom, all the systems have emphasized knowledge, the practice of righteous actions, and devotional love, in varying degrees. According to our positive thesis there are degrees of freedom, both psychological and metaphysical, depending on the context or situations. Hence, we can realize it in varying degrees, depending on our station in life (the situation we find ourselves in) or competence. Moreover, psychological free will is related to metaphysical freedom, as the righteous (*dhārmic*) actions will lead us to freedom if performed without selfish motive. Therefore, a type of *soft-soft* determinism in moral actions will pave the way for metaphysical freedom.

I shall also discuss how to realize freedom from suffering at social or global level. Here also the Advaita concept of Oneness can be used to alleviate the sufferings of teeming billions.

## Section I

In this section, I would like to mention the nature of human beings from the perspective of Indian philosophers, as freedom is one of the essential features of human beings.

According to Indian philosophers, human beings exhibit not only rationality at the level of thought, or anxiety at the level of emotion, but also certain other characteristics that will distinguish them from other higher animals. The form of life of a human being can be described by the following features:

- (1) Some of their actions are guided by the concept of *ought* or *ought not*. In other words, human beings are guided by the concept of *dharma* (righteousness) and *adharma* (unrighteousness). The word '*dharma*' has been used in a very wide sense by Indian philosophers. The core meaning of the word '*dharma*' is derived from the root '*dhr*,' meaning 'to hold,' 'to support,' etc. Hence, *x* is a *dharma* means that (a) *x* supports the world (*dharati lokān*); (b) *x* supports the human society as well as the world (*yo-lokān-dhārayati, yena-mānava-samājo-dhṛtaḥ-sa-dharmaḥ*); (c) *x* will help those who have fallen, are about to fall, or will fall (*patitaṁ-patantaṁ-patiṣyantam-dharatīti-dharmaḥ*); (d) *x* is the foundation of the universe as well as the world (*dharmo-viśvasya-jagataḥ-pratiṣṭhā*); (e) *x* also leads to something higher, such as peace and bliss (*ya-eva-śreyaskaraḥ-sa-eva-dharmaśabdena-ucyate*); <sup>1</sup> (f) *x* is real or truth (*yo-dharmaḥ-satyam-vaitat*).<sup>2</sup>

From these uses of the word '*dharma*' it follows that our total well-being is dependent on *dharma*. The laws of *dharma* are as real as the laws of nature.

- (2) The concept of *ought* presupposes what we can do and what we cannot do. In other words, if I ought to do *x*, then it follows that I can do *x*. Again, the latter presupposes freedom. Almost all the systems of Indian philosophy have accepted some concept of freedom or other. It is to be noted that most Indian philosophers are either compatibilists or libertarians, although some of them have gone beyond both categories. Indian philosophers, by and large, emphasize the ability and the achievement of human beings by their effort.

Human effort or freedom has been emphasized from the very dawn of Indian philosophy. To quote *Maitri Upaniṣad* <sup>3</sup>:

*Sāmsāra is just one's thought, with effort one should cleanse it.*

...

*The mind, in truth, is for mankind the means of bondage and release.*

<sup>1</sup> Shanbhag, D.N., 'Concept of Dharma and Dharmaśāstra', in *Dharmaśāstra and Social Awareness*, edited by V.N. Jha, Indian Book Centre, Delhi, 1996, pp 35-36

<sup>2</sup> Shastri, D.C., 'Bhāratīya dharmanīti o tāra kayekati dika', in *Bhāratīya Dharmanīti*, edited by Amita Chatterjee, Allied Publishers, Calcutta, 1998, pp 29-30

<sup>3</sup> Chapple, C., *Karma and Creativity*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1986, p 34

*If bound to objects, bondage follows, from objects free – that is called release.*

From this passage it follows that we can overcome some of the obstacles to our existence by our effort of free will. In the Yoga system also we can overcome our suffering by controlling our senses or internal organs, including various modifications or ‘modes of mind.’ Through our effort we can transform our minds, which is necessary for liberation.

In the *Mahābhārata* also human effort plays a great role, as there is no scope for fatalism. What is called ‘fate’ (*‘daiva’*) is nothing but the karmic residue of one’s effort. To quote<sup>4</sup>:

*Just as a field sown without seed is barren  
So without human effort there is no fate.*

The *Yogavāsīṣṭha* lays much more emphasis on human effort than on anything else. It is claimed that our actions determine our future, as there is no fate. To quote<sup>5</sup>:

*Those who abandon their diligence  
and take their last resort in fate  
destroy all righteousness, wealth, and pleasure  
and are their own enemy ( II:7.3).*

*By human exertion Brhaspati became  
teacher of gods ( II:7.7).*

From the above remarks, it follows that Indian philosophers, by and large, have emphasized free will or effort for achieving our desired ends, including metaphysical freedom or liberation. Hence, fatalism has no role to play in the context of Indian philosophy.

- (3) Human beings are guided by the concept of infinity. This happens both in morality and knowledge. There is an inherent craving for the unknown and a search for the knowable. No matter how much I know, I can say ‘I could have known more.’ Similarly, no matter how many righteous activities I perform, I can say ‘I could have performed more.’ Hence, the form of life of a human being exhibits participation in infinity both at the level of knowledge and of morality. When it is said that we are potentially infinite or infinite bliss or knowledge, what is meant is that we cannot draw any limit to our knowledge, practice of *dharma*, compassion, or love.
- (4) Another dimension of our form of life is creativity or suggestive meaning. This is exhibited in our language or understanding of language, art, music, literature, etc. At the level of literature or art, suggestive meaning has been introduced in addition to conventional or metaphorical meaning. It is claimed that those who understand only the literal meaning do not realize the significance of speech. It is said in the Vedas that the person who

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp 96-97

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp 110-111

understands only the literal meaning is the person who sees, but does not see, or hears, but does not hear.<sup>6,7</sup>

Let us consider the sentence 'The village is on the Ganges' ('*gaṅgāyām ghoṣaḥ*'). The literal meaning of the word '*gaṅgā*' is the river Ganges. Hence, the literal meaning of the sentence is 'The village is on the river Ganges.' Since the literal meaning gives rise to inconsistency as the village cannot be on the river, we resort to the metaphorical meaning and interpret the sentence as, 'The village is on the bank of the river Ganges.'

But the suggestive meaning goes beyond the metaphorical meaning in several directions. There are no rules for suggestive meaning as we have for metaphorical meaning. Moreover, it presupposes creativity on the part of the subject. For this reason one may attribute holiness to the village, another purity, and still another may consider it to be a suitable place for making a journey. The creativity of human beings gives us a clue to our life, which is not purely mundane or governed by a fixed set of rules.

- (5) The realization of certain *rasas*, that are impersonal in nature, suggests the spiritual nature of human beings. *Rasa* cannot be identified with our usual emotions, although it presupposes our ordinary emotions for its manifestation or realization.

According to some literary critics, there are ten permanent emotions (*sthāyibhāva*) and 33 variant emotions (*vyabhicāribhāva*). The permanent or the abiding emotions are: (1) *rati* (love), (2) *hāsyā* (mirth or laughter), (3) *śoka* (grief), (4) *krodha* (anger), (5) *utsāha* (inspiration), (6) *bhaya* (fear), (7) *jugupṣā* (disgust), (8) *vismaya* (wonder), (9) *sama* or *nirveda* (state of tranquility or spirit of renunciation), and (10) *bhakti* (spirit of devotion).<sup>8</sup>

It is to be noted that these permanent emotions are abiding impressions of our mind and produce *rasa*, a type of realization. *Rasa* is a kind of super-mundane (*lokottara*) experience, although it has its origin in certain intense emotions.

## Section II

In this section, I would like to focus on the psychological or the ethical concept of freedom. Hence, I shall discuss whether our will is free in some sense or the other. Broadly speaking, we come across three views in Western philosophy, known as determinism, compatibilism, and libertarianism. In order to draw the distinction between these views let us begin with the following example:

Suppose, after your main course of dinner in the dining hall, you have been asked to select either a creamy chocolate cake or an apple. Suppose that you selected the former. After eating the creamy chocolate cake you realize that you should not have

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp 76-77

<sup>7</sup> Kunjunn Raja, K., *Indian Theories of Meaning*, The Adyar Library and Research Centre, Madras, 1969, p 278

<sup>8</sup> Shastri, D.C., *Aspects of Indian Psychology*, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, West Bengal, 1988, pp 36-39

eaten it, as you are putting on weight. So you said to yourself ‘I could have chosen an apple instead of the big creamy chocolate cake.’ Here comes the problem of free will.

Let us deal with this example to show the difference between the views on free will or freedom.

- (1) Determinism: The determinists claim that you could not have chosen an apple instead of the chocolate cake. They claim that every event has a cause and the same set of causal conditions cannot produce two different effects. Hence, it is not possible for you to do something different from what you did in the past. It is claimed that what you do depends on your beliefs, choices, desires, circumstances, heredity, socioeconomic situation, etc. Hence, all the factors taken together will determine a particular or specific action of an individual; given the same set of conditions you would not have chosen an apple instead of a piece of chocolate cake.

The consequences of determinism can be stated in the following way<sup>9</sup>:

- 1) If determinism is true, then every action is causally necessitated.
- 2) If every action is causally necessitated, we can never do otherwise than we do.
- 3) If we can never do otherwise, then we are not free agents.
- 4) Hence, if determinism is true, then we are not free agents.
- 5) If we are not free agents, then we are not responsible for our actions

The view of the determinists raises the problem of moral responsibility. How can we praise someone who is kind and generous or condemn someone else who is a serial killer? Their actions are caused by their experiences, desires, beliefs, hereditary constitutions, and socioeconomic conditions. Hence, there is neither moral responsibility nor autonomy of an individual.

In this context it is to be noted that determinism is not identical with fatalism, although sometimes it is equated with fatalism. According to fatalism, as we cannot change the occurrence of any past event, so we cannot change the occurrence of any future event. In other words, if an event E is going to occur, then no matter what we do, we cannot prevent its occurrence. Similarly, if something is not going to occur, we cannot make it occur. Hence, what will happen in the future is determined, even if we struggle to avoid it. Our efforts – mental, physical – have no influence on future events. They are superfluous.

But determinism claims that what will happen is at least partly determined through our struggle or mental effort. Moreover, it is to be noted that determinism relies on causal necessitation, but fatalism is compatible with randomness, or miracles. If someone is fated to die at such and such a time, then it will occur no matter what we do to prevent it. Similarly, if a person is fated to recover from a certain deadly disease, then she will recover no matter what the doctors predict. Hence, fatalism may defy causal necessitation and substantiate miracles or our inability to explain certain phenomena. Therefore,

<sup>9</sup> Watson, G., ‘Free Will’, in *A Companion to Metaphysics*, edited by J. Kim and E. Sosa, Blackwell, Oxford, 1995, p 179

it leads to the rejection of the deterministic thesis, that an event is necessitated by what has occurred before it.

(2) Compatibilism: The theory known as ‘compatibilism’ tried to solve some of the problems of determinism. It takes different forms.

- (a) The Hume-Mill-Schlick variety of compatibilism is called ‘soft determinism.’ According to this view, there is no contradiction between the propositions that every event has a cause and that some of the actions of human beings are free. In other words, freedom is not opposed to the principle of causation. According to this view, ‘free action’ does not mean ‘uncaused action.’ The supporters of this view would define freedom in the following way.

The action  $x$  of  $A$  is free iff  $A$  is not compelled or constrained to perform  $x$ . Here the word ‘compelled’ or ‘constrained’ refers to external ‘compulsion’ or ‘constraint.’ To quote Paul Edwards<sup>10</sup>:

*Sometimes people act in a certain way because of threats or because they have been drugged or because of a posthypnotic suggestion or because of an irrational overpowering urge such as the one that makes a kleptomaniac steal something he does not really need. On such occasions human beings are not free agents. But on other occasions they act in certain ways because of their own rational desires, because of their own unimpeded effort, because they have chosen to act in these ways. On these occasions they are free agents although their actions are just as much caused as actions that are not deemed free. In distinguishing between free and unfree actions we do not try to mark the presence and absence of causes but attempt to indicate the kind of causes that are present.*

According to Schlick, the free will controversy arises because of the confusion of compulsion with causality, and necessity with universality. To quote him<sup>11</sup>:

*Freedom means the opposite of compulsion; a man is free if he does not act under compulsion, and he is compelled or unfree when he is hindered from without in the realisation of his natural desires. Hence, he is unfree when he is locked up, or chained, or when someone forces him at the point of a gun to do what otherwise he would not do.*

It is to be noted that Schlick excludes external compulsion only. It does not exclude causality or the relation between natural desires and our actions. Hence, compulsion and causality are two different concepts. Similarly, necessity and universality are different concepts.

From the above remarks of Schlick it follows that ‘causality’ should not be interpreted as ‘compulsion.’ Since the traditional problem of free will rests on the misuse of language, it is to be considered as a pseudo-problem. But if ‘freedom’ is defined as ‘absence of compulsion or interference’, then there is no contradiction between freedom

<sup>10</sup> Edwards, P., ‘Hard and Soft Determinism’, in *Determinism and Freedom in the Age of Modern Science*, ed. S. Hook, New York University Institute of Philosophy, 1961

<sup>11</sup> Schlick, M., ‘The Problem of Ethics’, in *Readings in Ethical Theory*, ed. W. Sellers and J. Hospers, Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York, 1952, p 150

and causality. Hence, the Hume-Mill-Schlick version of compatibilism defines human freedom in a negative way.

- (b) In Kant, we come across another version of compatibilism. Here also freedom is not lawlessness. It is compatible with causation.

According to Kant,<sup>12</sup> free will is goodwill, moral will, will that is determined by the Categorical Imperative or by the concept of duty. It is a will that is good, not as a means to some further end, but in itself. It is the highest good and the condition of all other types of goodness, ‘even of all our demands for happiness.’

According to Kant, will is determined by inclination or by reason, but not by both. If a will is determined by inclination, which is nothing but our habitual desires for pleasure or happiness, then our will is not free. But, on the contrary, if our will is determined by the categorical imperative, which is a manifestation of practical reason, then our will is free.

Therefore, a will is considered free when it comes under moral law. Kant’s conception of freedom emphasizes the positive aspect of it. It is not only free from external determination or determination by inclination, but also determined exclusively by reason or moral law. But the compatibilism of Hume-Mill-Schlick emphasizes only the exclusion or compulsion by external forces.

- (c) Another type of compatibilism can be constructed from the philosophy of Gilbert Ryle.<sup>13</sup> In his philosophy mental epithets, such as ‘will,’ ‘motive,’ ‘intelligence,’ ‘vanity,’ ‘jealousy,’ etc., are dispositional terms. They do not refer to any entities, overt or covert. Hence, motives and intentions cannot be considered causes.

When we say that a person has acted out of free will, we are referring to his manner of doing things. It can be distinguished from an action that is done under compulsion. Hence, free will is adverbial to our actions, not a cause or an entity. Since both the principle of causality and free will in the form of manner of doing things can be retained, it can be considered as another type of compatibilism, but not another type of soft determinism as desires or motives are not entities.

- (3) Libertarianism: The libertarians assign freedom to the agent. Hence, a person would have made a different choice even if all other conditions were the same. In our example, you could have chosen an apple instead of a piece of creamy chocolate cake in the same situation. The choice of the agent is not determined by his/her character or by any external influence. C.D.<sup>14</sup> has characterized the libertarian position in terms of the following two propositions:

- i) *Some (and it may be all) voluntary actions have a causal ancestor that contains a cause factor the putting-forth of an effort that is not completely determined in direction and intensity by occurrent causation.*

<sup>12</sup> Kant, I., *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by H.J. Paton, Harper Torchbooks, London, 1956.

<sup>13</sup> Ryle, G., *The Concept of Mind*, Barnes & Noble Books, London, 1949

<sup>14</sup> Broad, C.D., ‘Determinism, Indeterminism, and Libertarianism’, in *Free Will and Determinism*, ed. Bernard Berofsky, Harper & Row, New York, 1966, p 159



- ii) *In such cases the direction and the intensity of the effort are completely determined by non-occurrent causation, in which the self or agent, taken as a substance or continuant, is the non-occurrent total cause*

It is to be noted that the self or the agent is the non-occurrent cause, although it is not totally disconnected to our past experiences. This is how it avoids randomness. Again, it cannot be said to be an effect of past experiences. Thus, it avoids determinism. It is also claimed that the agent is a *causa sui*, or self-caused. But these claims do not seem to be consistent with each other.

As regards the explanation of choice from the perspective of Indian philosophy, most systems have proposed a type of compatibilism. Our choice is not random; it is determined by a set of causal conditions, including our desires and beliefs. Almost all the systems have claimed that a desire is due to the cognition that the object of desire is more conducive to pleasure than pain. In other words, if a person desires x, then he/she has the cognition that x will not give rise to undesirable consequences or pain, but will yield desirable consequences or happiness. If there are two alternatives, say x and y, then there will be cognition that y on balance is not as good as x. This complex cognition is a causal condition of our desire for x. In technical language, these two cognitions are called '*iṣṭasādhanatājñāna*' and '*balavattarāniṣṭājanakatvajñāna*.' Hence, the desire for x follows this complex cognition. The mental effort (*kṛti*) for x follows the desire for x. The latter is a causal condition of the former. Again the mental effort (*kṛti*) is a causal condition of physical effort (*cheṣṭā*), which in turn is a causal condition of action. This causal process has been mentioned in the following oft-quoted śloka (verse)<sup>15</sup> *jñānanyā bhavedicchā, icchānyā bhavet kṛtiḥ, kṛtijanyā bhaveccheṣṭā cheṣṭānyā bhavet kriyā*.

From the above discussion, it follows that our choice, or desire, or effort is dependent upon certain beliefs or cognitions. If the cognition, say S, is causally related to the object of desire, say x, then the same cognition cannot be a cause of another object of desire, say y. Hence, our choice or desire is determined by certain beliefs. When we say 'I would have chosen an apple,' what we mean is that 'if I had the cognition that an apple is conducive to my well-being and will not produce any undesirable consequences, then I would have chosen it.' On this view, our will or choice is free in the sense that it is not determined by external causal conditions such as compulsion, coercion, or persuasion. Hence, it is a type of compatibilism or soft determinism.

From the above discussion it follows that Indian philosophers, in general, favor compatibilism. However, the followers of the Śākta Āgama and a few other minor schools favor libertarianism. This is due to the fact that the self, which is the agent of our actions, is free to some extent even at the empirical or phenomenal level. Hence, according to this view, it is the agent that decides or makes a choice. This type of libertarianism is to be distinguished

<sup>15</sup> Shastri, D.C., *Aspects of Indian Psychology*, p X; see also J.L.Shaw, 'Man and Freedom-A Comparative Study', in *Man and Freedom*, ed. S. K. Sen, Indian Academy of Philosophy, 2001

from the Western type, as the agent is a free flow of consciousness, limited by knowables. When it is limited by knowables, it is called ‘degenerated consciousness.’ Hence, the consciousness, which is limited or degenerated, makes the choice. In our above example, it could have chosen an apple instead of a creamy chocolate cake.

### Section III

In this section, I would like to mention Swami Vivekananda’s conception of free will or freedom. He has tried to make both morality and religion independent of any supernatural beings. At the end of this section, I will mention the Bhagavad Gita’s paths for the realization of freedom.

Vivekananda’s view of free will can be called ‘soft-soft determinism,’ and it coincides with one of the concepts of liberation or *mokṣa*. I shall also point out that his conception of freedom does not presuppose the traditional law of karma or its presuppositions. Since his view follows from his conception of morality, I would like to discuss it. Vivekananda considers all traditional virtues such as love, kindness, compassion, brotherhood, justice, etc., as moral. But his conception of morality is more comprehensive than the traditional Western conception. These virtues will unite us with others. To quote<sup>16</sup>:

‘Love for yourselves means love for all, love for animals, love for everything, for you are all one.’

This is how he emphasizes unity as a dimension of morality. He has also emphasized another dimension of moral action called ‘unselfishness.’ He claims that a moral action must be unselfish.

To quote Vivekananda<sup>17</sup>:

‘That which is selfish is immoral, and that which is unselfish is moral.’

Another dimension of morality is freedom. He says<sup>18</sup>:

‘Selfish work is slave’s work....’

If we give up our attachment to this little universe of the senses or of the mind, we shall be free immediately.’

From these passages it follows that, according to Vivekananda, selfish actions make us slaves and unselfish actions make us free. Hence, freedom can be considered as another dimension of morality.

In this context it is to be noted that Vivekananda’s conception of freedom is not the same as Kant’s conception of free will. According to Kant a free will and a will that is determined by the categorical imperative are one and the same thing. In Kant the free will does not dissolve our inclination or desire for pleasure. Hence, the duties that are determined by the categorical imperative may be in accord with our

<sup>16</sup> *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol 1, Advaita Ashram, p. 301

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol.1, p 110

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p 57, 90

inclinations. But according to Vivekananda, moral actions, far from being related to happiness, dissolve the very concept of ego. Hence, a moral action is free in the sense that it is not performed under the compulsion of our ego and its associates.

I would like to claim that his conception of free will is different from all the Western concepts mentioned in Sect. II. It is a case of soft-soft determinism. Since in a moral action our will is not compelled by any external forces or interferences, it satisfies the requirement for soft determinism. Again, since it is not determined by any selfish motive or the concept of ego, it is free from internal compulsion. So it is free from two types of compulsion, outer and inner. For this reason it can be called 'soft-soft determinism.' Moreover, his conception of free will in morality is related to the metaphysical concept of freedom or *mokṣa*. Since freedom is a dimension of morality and depends on our being unselfish, it can be realized by any individual in this life.

Moreover, Vivekananda has not correlated morality with happiness and immorality with suffering. This is due to the fact that the unconditional value of morality cannot be retained if it is correlated with happiness.

I think an unselfish action not merely makes us free, but also leads to the realization of our dignity as a human being. In other words, by performing unselfish moral actions we attain a holy, transcendental, impersonal, or universal state, but by doing immoral actions we get a degraded or ignoble state.

Now I would like to mention the conception of freedom or liberation discussed in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Both unselfishness and not having desire or craving for the fruit of one's action have been repeatedly mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gītā*<sup>19</sup> for the attainment of liberation or freedom from bondage. To quote:

In liberty from the bonds of attachment, do thou therefore the work to be done; for the one whose work is pure attains indeed the supreme. (III, 19)

In the bonds of work I am free, because in them I am free from the fruits of desires. The person who can see this truth finds freedom in his/her work. (IV, 14)

The *Bhagavad Gītā* has also suggested methods for achieving the state of mind that is free from egoism and desire or craving for the fruits of actions. In order to achieve this state we have to practise *dharma* and illuminate our mind with the knowledge of the ultimate reality, including the self.

The *Bhagavad Gītā* emphasizes our duty, not only for the sake of itself, but also to free us from 'I-consciousness,' as the goal is to dissolve the distinction between 'I' and 'You.' Hence, the real freedom lies in dissolving not only egoism, but also the foundation of it, that is the distinction between 'I' and 'You.' In order to achieve this type of freedom, the *Bhagavad Gītā* has recommended both *dharmic* actions, knowledge and devotion or dedication. Different systems of Hindu philosophy, or streams of Hinduism, have emphasized these paths in varying degrees; some of them have emphasized the independence of these paths also. But a closer examination of the *Bhagavad Gītā* may reveal that they are not independent methods or paths. I think each of them refers to the rest, as each of them is related to the rest. Hence, knowledge without any unselfish (holy) work or devotion/love will not lead to freedom from bondage. Similarly, devotion/love without any holy work and knowledge will not lead to liberation (*mokṣa*). Again, an action that does not

<sup>19</sup> *The Bhagavad Gītā*, translated by Juan Mascaro, Penguin Classics, England, 1962

presuppose knowledge or devotion cannot be distinguished from an inert mechanical action. But an action that is enlightened by knowledge and is dedicated to the Almighty becomes unselfish and free from any craving. Let us quote a few passages from the *Bhagavad Gītā* in favor of this interpretation:

*Wisdom is in truth the end of all holy work. (IV, 33)*

*Ignorant persons, but not the wise, say that Sāṃkhya and Yoga are different paths; but he/she who gives all his/her soul to one reaches the end of the two. (V, 4)*

*The person who works for me, who loves me, whose End Supreme I am, free from Attachment to all things, and with love for all creation, he/she in truth comes to me. (XI, 55)*

From the above remarks it follows that since *Sāṃkhya* and *Yoga* are not different paths, the path of knowledge and the path of unselfish righteous action are also not different paths. Similarly, if a person loves God then he or she works for Him, and thereby loves His creation and works for His creation. Therefore, each of the paths will ultimately involve the rest, and the difference between them is initial, but not final. Hence, the *Bhagavad Gītā* does not prescribe renunciation of action, but renunciation in action, as our actions are to be guided by knowledge and are to be considered as offerings to the Almighty.

From the above discussion it follows that a type of soft-soft determinism will lead us to metaphysical freedom (*mokṣa*), which is interpreted as cessation from all types of suffering.

## Section IV

In this section, I would like to explain K.C. Bhattacharyya's concept of freedom and to compare it with the views of Bauddha philosophers, classical Advaita Vedāntins, and Swami Vivekananda. In this context, I would like to focus on his concept of grades of realization of subjectivity or freedom.

K.C. Bhattacharyya (hereafter KCB) claims that the subject is free from the object as it is known by itself. In order to emphasize the positive aspect of the freedom of the subject, he mentions the knowing function of the subject. In the knowing function, 'the subject is related to the object without getting related to it.'<sup>20</sup>

This point of KCB requires some explanation, because it emphasizes the direction of a relation. When we say '*b* is related to *a*' we emphasize the direction of the relation from *b* to *a*. If *b* is related to *a*, then *a* is also related to *b* by the converse of the same relation. KCB would accept this feature of the relation. But he introduces another aspect of a relation that can be captured by the expression 'constraint.'

In other words, the relation of subject to the object is not under compulsion or it is not a necessary relation. This is due to the fact that freedom of the subject lies in

<sup>20</sup> Bhattacharyya, K.C., *Studies in Philosophy*, ed. G. Bhattacharyya, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1983, p 388

freeing itself from objectivity or relationship to the objects of various types. As regards the knowledge of the subject, he says<sup>21</sup>:

The reality of the subject is known in the direct understanding of the word 'I' as used by a speaker, which is neither the understanding of its meaning nor a mystic intuition of an unspeakable content.

This passage also emphasizes the contingent relationship to the object as the subject can be experienced without reference to the object, although in our normal experience it is related to something or the other.

According to KCB, the meaning of spiritual progress lies in the realization of the freedom of the subject. The realization of freedom involves a feeling of dissociation of the subject from the object. Hence, a move from outward to inward or subject is a move towards freedom. KCB also introduces grades of subjectivity or modes of freedom from the object.

The first step towards freedom is the realization of our own bodily consciousness, which involves freedom from the perceived object. At this stage of freedom, the subject is not dissociated from the body, although there is realization of a distinction between the extra-organic object and the body.

The second stage of freedom is realized when we grasp the distinction between the perceived object, including our body on the one hand, and the images, ideas or meaning on the other. All these mental entities are included under the category of *presentation*. When consciousness is not dissociated from such presentations, but dissociated from the felt and perceived body, it is treated as presentational or psychic subjectivity. The realization of this subjectivity is a higher grade of freedom.

The next higher grade of subjectivity lies in the dissociation from presentation, which is another type of object. This type of subjectivity or freedom is called 'spiritual' or 'non-representational.'

So there are three types of subjectivity or freedom, namely, bodily, psychic, and spiritual. The stages of spiritual freedom would eventually lead to the realization of the subject as absolute freedom.

According to KCB, the body can be perceived as well as felt, but the perceived body can be distinguished from the felt body. In the feeling of the body we realize the first hint of freedom as freedom lies in the feeling of detachment. The progressive realization of the bodily subject lies in dissociating the subject or the *I* from the body, from the felt body, and from the sense-conditioned cognition of an absence or an absent object.

At the psychic level the subject does not identify itself with any aspect of the body; rather it negates the bodily aspect. The psychic stage also has several sub-stages. Broadly speaking, it can be divided into image and thought. After rejecting the bodily aspects, the subject tends to identify itself with the psychological facts such as image or idea. Since images or ideas are also objective in nature, it dissociates itself from them, and thereby they are also negated. Hence, anything that is believed or thought is rejected as subjective when we move from the psychic level to the spiritual level of subjectivity.

The spiritual level of subjectivity or freedom has been divided into three sub-stages, namely, feeling, introspection, and beyond introspection. At the level of

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p 389

feeling, there is no reference to anything objective or presentation. At this level, there is no distinction between awareness and its content. This stage of subjectivity is free from meaning-awareness as the subject is detached from actual or possible thought, including feeling. The rejection of this type of subjectivity paves the way for the realization of introspective subjectivity. As regards the nature of introspection, KCB says<sup>22</sup>:

Introspection is not believing *in* the I; it is the I, the believing that is not fact at all but is not, therefore, illusory.

It amounts to believing in itself, without any content. So at this stage the subject is free from content, but not free from the category of identity as there is 'believing in itself.'

At this level there is no distinction between consciousness and its content. But the meaning function of the word 'I' remains. I think this is due to the fact that the self is understood under the mode of the category identity.

Moreover, at introspective level the possibility of 'a silent self-enjoying *I* is intelligible.'<sup>23</sup> Hence, there is a need to go beyond the stage of introspection and to postulate the non-being of distinction in the absolute self. Therefore, real freedom or absolute freedom lies in rejecting all categories, including 'the category of distinctness.' For this reason he claims that in real freedom, the *I* is equated with *you*. As he says: 'The other person is to me another *I*....'<sup>24</sup> From the fact that you are another I to me, it does not follow that all types of distinction will disappear as you become part of my I. In order to reject this distinction he also claims: 'Lastly there is the consciousness of the over-personal self.'<sup>25</sup> As regards the nature of the transcendental self or freedom, he says, '...it is consciously *being* nought and not consciousness of *I* as nought.'<sup>26</sup>

I think what he meant by the word 'nought' is the rejection of all categories, subjective or objective, including the category of identity or difference. In this respect he has gone beyond the classical Advaita Vedānta, where metaphysical freedom of the individual lies in identifying oneself with the Absolute. Moreover, the over-personal self is not to be interpreted as *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda*, as these are also categories or values.

Now I shall construct a model to interpret the theory of KCB and to compare his theory with the views of other systems or philosophers.

I think the modal judgment of the form 'I might not have been such and such' and the concept of *constraint* might be used to interpret his view. Since Western philosophers are familiar with both concepts, our discussion will throw further light on KCB. According to Hume-Mill-Schlick, an action is free if it is not due to any external constraint.

It can be said that there are degrees of constraint, as well as internal and external constraint. Even identifying with something or the other is a type of constraint. In KCB, freedom implies freedom from all types of constraint, even identification with any type of categories. Hence, the I of KCB realizes the first step of freedom when it

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p 443

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p 443

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p 476

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p 476

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p 476

realizes that it is not the body. This realization can be expressed in the judgment, 'I might not have been the body.'

Similarly, 'I might not have been any psychical state.' So we move from bodily freedom to psychic freedom. At the level of spiritual freedom we rise above the categories such as subject-object, cognition-content, I-you, or identity.

As there are grades of subjectivity, there are degrees of freedom. The model of KCB can be stated thus: If I am  $x$ , then there is a judgment 'I might not have been  $x$ .' The latter judgment suggests freedom from  $x$  with which I cannot be identified. At the highest level of freedom, there is freedom from all categories, including identity. Hence, the stage of freedom called 'beyond introspection' implies a stage where the possibility of the judgment 'I might not have been  $x$ ' is ruled out. This stage of freedom is not only free from all correlatives, such as subjective-objective, existence-non-existence, being-non-being, but also free from epithets such as nameability and speakability.

At this level we cannot say that it is the subject that contemplates or enjoys, or that is truth, beauty, or goodness. It is truly a transcendent subjectivity or freedom that is different from all types of metaphysical freedom found in different systems of philosophy, Eastern and Western. Hence, the type of freedom KCB is talking about cannot be identified with the classical Advaita concept of freedom where the individual self is identified with the Absolute. This is due to the fact that it is also not free from all categorizations. Similarly, KCB's freedom cannot be identified with Vivekananda's concept of freedom. According to Vivekananda, freedom implies freedom from both external and internal constraint. Since the internal constraint is equated with selfishness, his freedom implies cessation of selfishness, not the cessation of all types of unselfish thoughts or feelings. Again, KCB's freedom is different from the Buddhist concept of freedom. In Buddhism, the difference between individuals will remain even if they are free. This is due to the fact the *alayavijñāns* of one individual cannot be identified with those of another.

It is to be noted that in KCB freedom is free from all types of constraint, cognitive or non-cognitive, causal or non-causal. This is due to the fact that the transcendental freedom of KCB is free from all types of categorization, cognitive or non-cognitive. Hence, the transcendental freedom would imply the cessation of judgments of the form 'I might not have been  $x$ ,' where ' $x$ ' stands for a category, subjective or objective.

From the above discussion it follows that in KCB we come across degrees of freedom and progressive realization of it. Moreover, his concept of transcendental freedom cannot be expressed by any category as it is the rejection of all categories. Hence, his conception is unparallel in the history of philosophy, Eastern or Western, although it is related to the classical Advaita concept. Therefore, it is also a new animal in our zoo.

## Section V

In this section, I would like to discuss whether freedom from suffering can be realized at social or global level, even if it can be realized at the individual level. So the question is: How can we realize it at a social or global level when there is a very

wide gap between the haves and have-nots, between the rich and the poor, between the developed and the developing nations? If philosophy is to be more practical, then we must address this question as well.

At present approximately 20 percent of the total population of the world own 60 percent of the land and natural resources. The socioeconomic condition of the nations can also be summarized in the following way.

- 1) Twenty percent of the global population living in developed countries consumes 16 times more than the 20 percent of the global population living in developing countries.
- 2) The GDP of 20 percent of the global population living in developed countries is 20 times higher than the GDP of 80 percent of the population of the developing countries.
- 3) The gap between the rich and the poor nations has been widened. In 1970, the ratio was 30:1, but after 30 years it was more than 61:1.
- 4) Still one billion people are living on less than US\$1 a day. The poorest 20% of the world's people account for 1.5% of the world income.
- 5) In relation to per capita consumption of electricity, some rich nations consume 100 times more than some poor or developing nations.
- 6) Still some 2.6 billion people do not have access to sanitation, and more than one billion people do not have access to clean water.<sup>27</sup>

When there is such a wide gap between the developing and the developed nations, between the haves and have-nots, it is difficult to realize freedom or harmony in the world, and thereby peace or happiness.

In order to achieve freedom at the global level and to save the world from total disaster, I would like to refer to the following message of the Vedic tradition: *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (the entire world is your relation) and the Oneness of the Advaita Vedānta. The Vedas and the Upaniṣads have added spiritual dimension to our life for the betterment or the liberation of the entire world. One of the great sayings is '*ahaṁ Brahmāsmi*'. Literally, it means 'I am identical with Brahman.'

Now it may be asked, what is Brahman? In reply, it is said, '*sarvaṁ khalu idaṁ—Brahma*,' meaning 'Everything is Brahman.' Hence, 'I am identical with everything.' Now it may be asked how I can be identical with Brahman. The followers of the Non-dualistic Vedānta claim that at a deeper level my consciousness is the same as the universal consciousness. But the supporters of the Dualistic Vedānta claim that what it means is that I am subservient to, or at the service of, God or divinity. It is to be noted that all the schools of Vedānta or streams of Hinduism emphasize righteous actions (*karma*), dedication or devotion (*bhakti*), and knowledge (*jñāna*) in varying degrees or at different levels of the realization of divinity in us.

But the materialists or the Marxists would contradict this thesis, as I am different from other things and there is no God or divinity. Since the Advaita Vedānta accommodates a range of truths without having inconsistency (*nirvirodhavāda*) as Gaudapāda, the great master of Sāṅkhya, claims, we can accommodate the views of

<sup>27</sup> *Human Development Report 2006: Beyond Scarcity, Power, Poverty, and the Global Water Crisis*, The United Nations Development Programme, New York, 2006.



the atheists or the materialists without abandoning the Oneness or the unity-in-diversity of the Vedāntins. On this point I would like to suggest that the great saying 'I am Brahman' means 'I am related to everything,' as my welfare, peace, or happiness depends on others, including other beings and nature at large. This is how the holistic outlook and the universal of *dharma* could be introduced for the betterment of all. In order to realize the unity with the world, or practice universal brotherhood or love, the ideal of oneness at global level is to be realized. This is possible if the countries are governed by a single world body and global resources such as food, water, and land are shared evenly. This would remove the root cause of the poverty of the teeming billions, the root cause of terrorism, and the root cause of the conflict or war between nations at global level. It would also resolve some of the problems caused by global warming, as there would be common projects or rules for the reduction carbon dioxide emission. This Oneness would promote some basic or core values, such as non-violence and love, and teach how to realize them in this life.

If several nations, such as Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, can form a union having a single currency and common passport, then all the nations in the world can also form a single government. Similarly, if 50 states in the USA can form a single government, then all the states in the world also can form a single government for the betterment of all. This will make the world nuclear free, armament free, strife free, and warming free.

Thus, it would pave the way for global freedom, peace, and harmony. It is for the betterment of all and every being. It will reduce our suffering and pave the way for the realization of our freedom from bondage.