CHAPTER - V: Freedom

5.1 Introduction: The place of freedom in the Indian philosophical traditions:

In the Indian philosophical traditions, the concept of freedom is viewed as the highest ideal of man. The synonymous words which refer to freedom in Indian thought are moksha, nirvana, nirodha, salvation, self-realization, etc. T.M.P. Mahadevan has said: “Every school of Indian thought, be it orthodox or heterodox, except Charvaka considers liberation to be the ultimate goal of the philosophical quest.”¹ According to Ravish Kohli: “Moksha or liberation from suffering and rebirth, is the chief end of life. There are three other goals: dharma or duty, artha or material success and kama or love. These too have to be practised in order to be successful in this life.”² Among these, freedom occupies a higher place than dharma, artha and kama because it forms the precondition for the realisation of all the others. Dharma, artha and kama have no value of their own, if freedom is separated

from them. ‘Freedom’, in the Indian philosophical tradition, “was a state of mind which brought the whole field of thought, emotion and effort under one rubric, treating the world of things and of persons as one and unique.”

Therefore, freedom from the strife of recurrent worldly life or Moksha is the highest goal for a human being in all Indian philosophical systems. The concept of Moksha and the route to moksha, however, vary from one system of philosophical thought to another.

(i). Freedom in Upanishads:

The Upanishads which contain the religious and spiritual thoughts of the Aryans, are some of the greatest exponents of Hindu philosophy. They explain the relation of matter, soul and God. The doctrine of Karma, salvation and the methods of its attainment have been fully elaborated in them. According to the Upanishads there is one creator, the Brahman, who is true, who is omnipresent. K. Munirathnan Chetty has said that according to “the Upanishadic seers, freedom or moksha lies in the identification of oneself as the Brahman. It is the very essence of Atman or self. It is

inseparable from being. It is not something that ought to be achieved afresh. It is not something which is not there previously and which ought to be brought into existence afterwards. Realizing freedom does not mean losing oneself in emptiness but finding oneself to be the ultimate Reality.”⁴ The Mahavakyas (great sayings) like “I am Brahman” “The self is Brahman” and “That Thou Art”⁵ show the freedom as a state of being. S.Radhakrishnan talks about the place of moksha or freedom in the Upanishads thus: “The self is not annihilated any more than the ray of the sun is lost in the sun, the wave of the sea in the ocean, the notes of music in the one harmony. The song of the individual is not lost in the music of the world march. It is the same forever and yet not the same.”⁶ The Brahman – Atman or the universal soul, is conceived as the highest divine person in the Isavasyopanishad and is believed to be within the individual self. It says: “The only God is hidden in all living things, permeates all things and lives as soul in all beings.”⁷

⁴ I bid., p. 130
⁵ I bid
⁷ Isavasyopanishad, I
(ii). Freedom in Jainism:

In Jainism, the concept of the cycle of Karma is similar with Hinduism as it springs out from Hinduism. Jainism accepts the doctrine of rebirth and karma (action), which teaches that the doer of any act must experience its effects in this or a later existence. The Karma already acquired leads to the acquisition of further karma and thus the cycle of transmigration continues indefinitely. On these premises transmigration can only be escaped by dispelling the Karma already adhering to the soul and ensuring that no more is acquired. According to Jain doctrines, Salvation consists in release from the circle of rebirth and on the attainment of perfect knowledge, and this is to be achieved through devotion to austerity and meditation. The Jains reject the conception of a Universal soul or a Supreme Power as the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. According to them, “God is only the highest, noblest, and fullest manifestation of the powers which lie latent in the soul of man.” The Jain goal of life is to attain deliverance from the fetters of mundane existence. Moksha can be achieved, if and when a Jain gets rid of all Karma inherited from past lives and acquires no new one. The way to this lies through the Three Jewels (Triratna) of right faith, right

9 S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, op. cit. Vol. I, p.331
knowledge, and right conduct. The Jains greatly emphasize the practice of penances, such as yogic exercises and fasting, even to the point of death. The idea is that rigorous discipline gives strength to the soul, and keeps the lower matter subdued.\textsuperscript{10} Mahavira was in favour of the emancipation of women. Women were admitted in Jain Sanga. Mahavira believed that women too enjoy the right to attain Nirvana or Moksha. Sarmini and Sravikas were the two sections of women in Jainism.

(iii). Freedom in Buddhism:

To attain Nirvana was the basic principle of Buddhism. It is to realise a tranquil state and is achieved when a person is free from all cravings or wants. In other religions Nirvana could be attained only after death but in Buddhism it could be attained in this world. The concept of nirvana is understood differently by different schools of Buddhism. In the Hinayana school of Buddhism, Dukkha (Sorrow, suffering, dissatisfaction) is inherent in life. It can be eliminated by giving up Tanha (Thirst/Craving) which includes ambition, desire, longing, etc. Tanha is caused by a mistaken

conviction of individuality. To this school, nirvana is the absence of ignorance, desire and action.

To the Mahayanists, nirvana consists in the total suppression of all the false constructions of our imagination. "It is simply an awakening from an unpleasant dream, the ending of a mental illness; it is to see aright."\(^{11}\)

Whereas the Hinayana school regarded the salvation of the individual as the goal, the Mahayana school has its objective the salvation of all beings. Buddhist literature is full of statement of personality and consciousness. The transformation is described in negative terms as the destruction of tanha (craving) and asavas (obsessions) and in positive terms as the emergence of prajna or sambodhi (transcendental wisdom) and Santi (peace).\(^{12}\)

(iv). Freedom in Gita:

According to the Gita, action originated from Brahma. Its cycle is endless; no one is free from the chain actions and its consequences. Misdeeds give birth to sad consequences and good deeds joyful consequences. All have to gather fruits of karma. In the Gita, Lord Krishna

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tells Arjuna that he is the medium through which His will operates. All things have already happened. Prakriti does things, not man; Prakriti is the agent of God. The ignorants are those who think that they are doing things. Man is not free. He is bound to the wheel of Prakriti and Karma. To quote from the Gita: “Action is the product of the qualities inherent in Nature. It is only the ignorant man, who, misled by personal egotism, says: I am the doer.”¹³ And “Having surrendered all claim to the results of his actions, always contended and independent, in reality, he does nothing, even though he is apparently acting.”¹⁴ The laws of Karma provide room for freedom in the Gita. Right and disinterested action and detachment are the major instructions of the Gita. Lord Krishna says: “Your right is to work only but never to its fruit. Let not be the fruit of action be your motive nor let your attachment be to inaction.”¹⁵ The man, who renounces his attachments to the fruits of action, and yet works in a detached way, remains free.

All aspirants of moksha regard the world as an ocean of misery and suffering. Man is a puppet, the strings of which are controlled by fate. No amount of human effort by way of renunciation, yogic discipline, meditation

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¹³ The Gita, 3:27
¹⁴ I bid., 4:20
¹⁵ I bid., 2:47
etc. may succeed in untrammeling us of worldly bounds. So when man expresses his helplessness and requests for God's intervention to rescue him from the empirical sufferings, God showers His Grace on man. "Go to Him alone for shelter with all thy being ... By His grace, thou shalt obtain supreme peace and the eternal abode." Thus, man attains freedom.

(v). Freedom in Charvaka's philosophical system:

Charvaka is believed to have introduced the doctrines of a philosophical system based on materialism between the seventh and sixth century B.C. during the time of Mahavira and Buddha. According to Charvaka, the soul was not given importance. Physical pleasure was given utmost importance. According to this philosophical system, "If liberation means the attainment of a state free from all pain, in this very life, it is also an impossible ideal." The controversial but fairly popular doctrine of Charvaka can be understood from the verse. "So long as you live, live with pleasure if necessary, by borrowing ghee (clarified butter)." According to this philosophical system, a life of maximum happiness is a good life. An action which brings maximum amount of pleasure is a good action and that

16 I bid., 18:62.
17 S. Chatterjee and D. Datta, An Introduction To Indian Philosophy, (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1968), Chapter II, p. 65
which brings pain is a bad action. This philosophical system denies the soul and its salvation. Because there is absence of soul, liberation as freedom of the soul from its bondage is silly. And migration of soul is absurd as there is no heaven. For Charvaka the body itself is the soul or self. Hence, Charvaka encouraged his followers to laugh, drink and make merry - in short, to enjoy everything without fear.\(^\text{18}\)

**5.2 Freedom according to Gandhi:**

Gandhi’s concept of freedom is a comprehensive one. The integral conception of the political, economic and moral freedom of man proceeded from his deep spiritual humanism. He claimed that his conception of freedom signified ‘the freedom of man in all his majesty’ because man is a soul. To him, freedom is a whole. For him freedom means not mere political awakening but an all round awakening – social, educational, moral, economic and political.\(^\text{19}\) National freedom as emancipation from the bondage of alien rulers and exploiters, moral freedom as emancipation from the slavery of passions, and spiritual freedom as emancipation from

\(^{18}\) See, H.K. Bhattacharya, “Breeze Through Life, says Sri Charvaka” in *The Times of India*, English daily newspaper, New Delhi, 24.5.2000, p. 14

\(^{19}\) *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, (New Delhi: Publications Division Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Govt. of India), Vol. 36, p. 230 (To be referred hereinafter as CWMG)
subservience to the demands of physical nature, and the realization of God
as Truth, are all phases of freedom. For one whose life was permeated by the
belief in the presence of a higher spiritual reality, any compromise with evil,
lust and slavery is wrong. Hence freedom has to be realized at all levels.
Gandhi’s conception of freedom can be stated to be a synthesis of the natural
right of the individual to attain political liberty as well as moral and spiritual
freedom. He does not maintain any sharp separation between the inner moral
and spiritual freedom and the outer freedom. 20

Freedom, according to Gandhi, was a process of growth in quest of an
articulated system of coherent moral purposes and actions. A man who
obtains freedom over his passions would not tolerate the social and
economic exploitation of his neighbors because they are really his own
selves. Gandhi used the Sanskrit word ‘Swaraj’ for the English word
‘freedom’. He said: “The word swaraj is a sacred word, a Vedic word,
meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraint which
‘independence’ often means.” 21 As every country is fit to eat, to drink and to
breathe, even so is every nation fit to manage its own affairs, no matter how

20 V.P. Varna, The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and Sarvodaya, (Agra: Lakshmir Narain
Agarwal, 1959), pp. 195-196

21 Young India, 19.3.1931, p.38
Answering to a query of Alice Schalek "What do you mean by freedom?" Gandhi said: "I want the freedom to make mistakes, and freedom to unmake them, and freedom to grow to my full height and freedom to stumble also. I do not want crutches." By Swaraj, he also meant "the government of India by the consent of the people as ascertained by the largest number of the adult population, male or female, native-born or domiciled, who have contributed by manual labour to the service of the State and who have been taken the trouble of having registered their names as voters... Real Swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused. In other words, Swaraj is to be obtained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority."

Freedom for Gandhi also means, 'Self-government' which "depends entirely upon our internal strength, upon our ability to fight against the heaviest odds. Indeed, self-government which does not require that continuous striving to attain it and to sustain it is not worth the name. I have, therefore, endeavored to show both in word and deed, that political self-

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22 Ibid, 15.10.1931, p. 305
23 CWMG, Vol. 41, p.301
24 Young India, 29.1.1925, pp.40-41
government, that is, self-government for a large number of men and women, is no better than individual self-government and, therefore, it is to be attained by precisely the same means that are required for individual self-government or self-rule."25 Thus self-government at length means continuous effort to be independent of government control, whether it is foreign government or whether it is national. Gandhi wrote in the Harijan dated 11.1.1936, that: "When people come into possession of political power, the interference with the freedom is reduced to a minimum."26 And self-government will be a sorry affair if people look up to it for the regulation of every detail of life.27 He further said that freedom for him, "is to keep intact the whole genius of our civilization. I want to write many new things but they must all be written on the Indian state. I would gladly borrow from the West when I can return the amount with decent interest."28 Raghavan Iyer comments that: "Gandhi equated freedom with self-rule because he wished to build into the concept of freedom the notion of obligation to others as well as to oneself, while retaining the element of

25 Young India, 1.12.1927, pp. 402-403
26 CWMG, Vol. 68, p. 122
27 Young India, 6.8.1925, p. 276
28 Ibid., 26.6.1924, p. 210
voluntariness that is the very basis of freedom. The notion of self-rule implies the voluntary internalization of our obligation to others which will be obstructed by our placing ourselves at the mercy of our selfish desires."^29

Obviously, in the context of the Indian national movement, national freedom for him also meant termination of British rule in India by means of Ahimsa and Satyagraha. He was always emphatic that freedom was not to be obtained through violence. For him non-violent non-Co-operation was the beginning and the end.^30 That is why he abruptly suspended the Non-co-operation Movement in 1922 as it turned violent. Gandhi has also mooted ‘Swaraj’ within the British Empire if possible, and without if necessary. For him Swaraj is to be within the British Empire at all, then it should be a case of the Indians voluntarily remaining in it with their ability to secede if they thought it desirable, and also a case of their being equal partners in it.^31

Replying in The Daily Mail dated 19.9.1931 in the Column "What I want", Gandhi said: "Independence is every nation’s birth right", and strongly asserted that "Nothing less than complete freedom in every sense of

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^30 The Tribune, English daily, Lahore, 22.10.1920

^31 CWMG, Vol. 16, pp. 377-378
the term can make India happy and strong."\textsuperscript{32} Swaraj for Gandhi could be obtained only by intense suffering and struggle. It would be wrong to believe that it would come as a gift. Gandhi said in 1922 that: "Swaraj can never be a free gift by one nation to another. It is a treasure to be purchased with a nation's best blood ... The fact is that swaraj will be a fruit of incessant labour, suffering beyond measure."\textsuperscript{33} Again in 1928, he insisted upon the people's will or strength to obtain freedom through their suffering and struggle. "Swaraj is not going to descend on us from the heavens. It will not be received as a gift from the British Empire either. It can only be the reward of our own efforts. The very word swaraj means effort by the nation ... No one will be able to stand in our way when we have developed the strength to win Swaraj. Everyone's freedom is within his own grasp."\textsuperscript{34} Gandhi also talked about Poorna Swaraj. He explained what he meant by complete freedom or Poorna Swaraj. It is 'Poorna'/ complete "because it is as much for the prince as for the peasant, as much for the rich landowner as for the landless tiller of the soil, as much for the Hindus as for the Musalmans, as much for Parsis and Christians as for the Jains, Jews and Sikhs, irrespective

\textsuperscript{32} CWMG, Vol. 53, p. 387  
\textsuperscript{33} CWMG, Vol. 25, pp. 389-390  
\textsuperscript{34} CWMG, Vol. 42, p. 454
of any distinction of caste or creed or status in life.”

He further continued: “The Swaraj of my dream is the poor man’s Swaraj. The necessaries of life should be enjoyed by you in common with those enjoyed by the princess and the moneyed people. But that does not mean that you should have palaces like theirs. They are not necessary for happiness. You or I would be lost in them. But you ought to get all the ordinary amenities of life that a rich man enjoys. I have not the slightest doubt that Swaraj is not Poorna Swaraj until these amenities are guaranteed to you under it.”

5.3 Different aspects of freedom:

(i). Individual freedom:

Gandhi upheld the dignity and authority of the individual throughout his life. He has an unflinching faith in the freedom of the individual for his moral development on the lines of truth and non-violence. According to him, there can be no development to mankind without individual freedom. He regarded the individuals as the center of moral power whose freedom is


essential for all round development and progress of the society. As he said: “If the individual ceases to count, what is left of society? Individual freedom alone can make a man voluntarily surrender himself completely to the service of society. If it is wrested from him, he becomes an automation and society is ruined.”

To Gandhi, the individual must be given the greatest possible freedom to develop his personality in the way which suits him best. And one criteria for the all round development of an individual is freedom of speech. Gandhi pleaded for freedom of speech even during the Second World War. He said: “I claim the liberty of going through the streets of Bombay and say that I shall have nothing to do with this war and in this fratricide that is going on in Europe.” He further said: “Freedom of speech and corresponding action is the breath of democratic life. Freedom of propagating non-violence as substitute for war is the most relevant when indecent savagery is being perpetrated by the warring nations of Europe.”

During the struggle for national freedom from the English yoke Gandhi laid down certain pre-qualifications for an individual to follow. One

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37 M.K. Gandhi, *India of My Dreams*, op. cit., p. 21
39 Ibid.
of them is personal purification. But, “Purification is purification only when it is voluntary. And the way to freedom lies not through compulsion, but sweetness, persuasion and humility.”\(^{40}\) That is why he pleaded the people to give up liquor, opium, tobacco, etc., voluntarily if they have these vices.\(^{41}\) Gandhi also stressed the necessity of women to take part in the freedom struggle and self-purification like the men. He said: “Women also should take part in the attainment of swaraj and self-purification like the men. I do not speak of swaraj but of Ramarajya. If there is no Sita there is no Ramarajya. If you want Ramarajya all of you should become Sitas.”\(^{42}\) Another qualification for national freedom of an individual is fearlessness. Gandhi reinforced the national workers thus: “We should cultivate fearlessness before we can achieve swaraj. While we have the spark of the Divine in us, never should we fear any human being.”\(^{43}\) On the whole Gandhi stressed that “Absolute personal purity, humility, understanding and ceaseless activity are the things necessary for attaining swaraj...”\(^{44}\)

\(^{40}\) CWMG, Vol. 22, p. 487
\(^{41}\) Ibid., Vol. 43, p. 66
\(^{42}\) Ibid., Vol. 45, p. 320
\(^{44}\) CWMG, Vol. 22, p. 493
Gandhi viewed that there can be no political freedom without from moral freedom. That is why he believed that the root of political freedom lies in individual moral development. An individual has to stick to truth, non-violence or love, non-stealing and courage. He must also have control over lust. An individual cannot rule over himself without conquering the lust within him. He said: “Swaraj means rule over one’s own self, not over another. It means controlling one’s self. He who has gained control over his sense organs, has obtained almost everything.”^45 He must be ready to face self-suffering. He should totally restrain from the use of physical force in any field of life. He must be ready to sacrifice everything including himself for the common welfare of the society. He said: “I value individual freedom, but you must not forget that man is essentially a social being. He has risen to this present status by learning to adjust his individualism to the requirements of social progress. Unrestricted individualism is the law of the beast of the jungle. We have to learn to strike the mean between individual freedom and social restraint. Willing submission to social restraint for the sake of the

well-being of the society enriches both the individual and the society of which one is a member.  

(ii). Political aspect of freedom:

Gandhi advocated that each nation should have its own system of government in keeping with its own history, culture, traditions and civilization. So he propounded the word ‘Ramrajya’, which he equated with ‘Swaraj or freedom’ and recommended it for establishing an ideal state. He defined Ramrajya as, “the establishment of the Kingdom of righteousness on earth.”

He said: “By ‘Ramrajya’ I do not mean Hindu Raj. I mean by ‘Ramrajya’ the Divine Raj, the Kingdom of God.” He further continued: “The ancient ideal of Ramrajya is undoubtedly one of true democracy in which the meanest citizen could be sure of swift justice without an elaborate and costly procedure.” And Gandhi recommended democracy as a form of government for free India since this form of government fully provides the political freedom of all people – the rich and poor, prince and peasant, men and women. Gandhi elaborated his view of Ramrajya thus: “There can be no

47 Young India, 4.5.1921, p. 143
48 ibid., 19.9.1929, p. 305
49 ibid., 28.9.1931, p. 126
Ramrajya in the present state of iniquitous inequalities in which a few roll in riches and the masses do not get even enough to eat.”\textsuperscript{50} Therefore, Swaraj for Gandhi is the poor man’s swaraj.\textsuperscript{51} During the freedom struggle, Gandhi emphatically voiced that political freedom for India should not be won through bloody means, but she has to achieve her freedom by peaceful means. As he said in the Lahore speech, dated 19.10.1920: “Freedom was not to be attained through violence.”\textsuperscript{52} Gandhi wanted to bring freedom for the Indians from the British rule because, “India is poorer in wealth, in manliness, in godliness and in her sons’ power to defend themselves. It is sinful to coquet with evil. There is no meeting ground between good and evil – God and Satan ... English Rule in its present form has proved a curse to India.”\textsuperscript{53} But gaining political freedom from the British raj for India was not his sole aim. His idea of political freedom has a wider significance. For him no nation can enjoy real political freedom as long as it uses its political dominion over another country. He said: “Through the deliverance of India,
I seek to deliver the so called weaker races of the earth from the crushing heels of western exploitation."54

Political freedom, for Gandhi, also meant that the people of the country must be in complete control of all the political institutions.55 The national freedom will be a real thing only if the masses develop the capacity to resist the authority when it is abused. In Swaraj state the ultimate power would be vested with the people. The political power is decentralized in such a way that even the smallest man can enjoy the freedom without any social, political or economic disability. It need not follow the resolutions of the majority blindly. That is nothing but slavery. Even the majority must tolerate and respect the opinion and action of the minority. Gandhi said: "The rule of majority has a narrow application, i.e. one should yield to the majority in matters of detail. But it is slavery to be amenable to the majority, no matter what its decisions are . . . Under democracy, individual liberty of opinion and action is jealously guarded. I, therefore, believe that the minority has a perfect right to act differently from the majority."56 Tolerance, therefore, is the spirit of true political freedom. The real political freedom for Gandhi was

54 M.K. Gandhi, *India of My Dreams*, op. cit., p. 299
55 CWMG, Vol. 20, p. 507
56 M.K. Gandhi, *India of My Dreams*, op. cit., p. 21
multiclass freedom and no class of society was to be excluded. It is true that Gandhi had an inclination towards the toiling masses but his concept of political freedom (swaraj) was an all class state.

(iii). Economic aspect of freedom:

Economic Freedom, to Gandhi, meant easy availability of food, clothing and shelter to all the people in the country. The production of these necessities of life should be localized. Localization of production should be such that every village and town should be self-sufficient in these basic necessities of life. Economic freedom will not be complete (Poorna) until such conditions are created. At the national level, economic freedom meant the ability to preserve certain Indian industries which are essential for its economic existence. These essential national industries are agriculture and cottage industries. Without the revival and development of these industries, economic freedom and equality cannot be ensured to all the Indians.\(^{57}\) Gandhi believed that the economic good of all lay in adopting the principle of swadeshi or self-sufficiency. ‘Swadeshi dharma’, according to Gandhi is

the only means through which India can become prosperous. Everything else
is mere bookish theory. This alone is swaraj. 58

Gandhi wanted the people of India to use goods produced in their own
country. Gandhi used the principle of swadeshi as a political weapon to
boycott the foreign goods, particularly of the British goods. He said: “The
nations that had been able to remain economically independent had always
enjoyed swaraj . . . India’s swadeshi lay in producing her food-stuffs and her
cloth. As regards food-stuffs they had fortunately no need to take a vow, as
people used, for the most part, food-stuffs produced in the country. As
regards clothing, they were in a serious predicament. Once the producers of
the finest cotton and silken fabrics, today they were dependent on Japan and
Lankashire.” 59

During the struggle for national freedom, Gandhi was asked the
relevance of spinning in the political fight with the question ‘how will the
spinning-wheel help the non-co-operation fight’? He said: “It will help us to
achieve the economic freedom of the country. Until we have won this, we
shall not truly enjoy swaraj. We can go without soap, or needles, or pins, but
not without cloth. At present, we are not able to export as much as we

58 CWMG, Vol. 18, p.191
59 Ibid., p.246
import. This leads to increased economic loss every year... We part with 60 crores for cloth, besides what is thrown away on in essential articles. If this is true, we must achieve economic freedom ..."60 And 'the purest swadeshi vow' for him will "be to use cloth made out of yarn spun by one's wife, sisters and children in the home."61 Therefore, Gandhi asked all Indians to purify themselves from the sin of wearing foreign cloth. He said: "It is an evil and a shame from which at the earliest possible moment one should be purified. Wipe out the stigma that we are so helpless that other nations have to clothe us."62

In Gandhi's economic system one is expected to be self-sufficient producing one's own requirements and not in the least dependent on others. The goods to be produced and consumed should be basic necessities and there is hardly any room or justification for the production of modern luxuries and amenities. The goods should however be produced by traditional methods, and machine has no place in Gandhi's economic system. 63 Therefore, he always advocated cottage industries. He believed

60 CWMG, Vol. 22, p. 210
61 CWMG, Vol. 18, p. 117
62 CWMG, Vol. 45, p. 416
that the poverty of the people could be lessened if they were given work for their spare time so that they can earn. For him, it was the only way to rehabilitate the people of the villages.

Gandhi believed that the village economy in India was ruined during the British regime and hence it was necessary to rehabilitate the same. His view was that rural uplift was essential if the standard of life of the people was to be raised. Gandhi was very unhappy regarding the miserable condition of the people living in villages. He said: “Over 75 percent of the populations are agriculturists. But there cannot be much spirit of self-government about us if we take away or allow others to take away from them almost the whole of the result of their labour.”

Hence he formulated a constructive programme which contained such things as Khadi, rural industries, village sanitation, basic education, economic equality, etc.

Economic freedom, for Gandhi also means freedom from material want. Poverty is the main obstacle to the individual happiness and freedom. He rightly visualized the inter-relation between individual happiness and material freedom. He said: “Every human being has a right to live and therefore to find wherewithal to feed himself and where necessary to clothe

64 M.K. Gandhi, *India of My Dreams*, op. cit., pp.91 – 92
and house himself.” Possessing material goods leads to the right to property. Gandhi recognised this as the national right of the individual. But his conception of economic freedom is not based on force, violence, exploitation or accumulation.67

Gandhi did not want millions to be starving and a few having too much wealth. He said: “Economic equality is master key of Poorna Swaraj.”68 Each individual was entitled to get what he needed provided his needs were natural. Every individual will be free from his economical burdens if his basic needs like food, clothing and shelter are fulfilled. For him amassing anything more than what one’s need is sinful. Men with capital should voluntarily share their fruits with their common workers under trusteeship. This institution of trusteeship is to be one of the basic features of a Swaraj state. There, for the surplus wealth, the rich act as trustees and use them for the common good, without thinking them as their own. Thus, practice of non-possession and economic equality secures one’s economic freedom.

66 M.K. Gandhi, The Voice of Truth, Section VII, Ch.35, p.323
67 K. Munirathnam Chetty, op.cit., p.180
(iv). Social aspect of freedom:

By social freedom, Gandhi meant a progressive social life which is based on individual freedom and equality. For him, individual freedom is closely related to social freedom. He was of the opinion that society has to provide freedom and opportunities for the moral development of the life of the individual. However, he rejects the principle of absolute individualism and puts moral restrictions on the individual to learn to fulfill social obligations which are conducive for the development of the society.\(^6\)\(^9\) No society can develop without individuals and vice versa. He said: “A nation cannot advance without the units of which it is composed advancing, and conversely no individual can advance without the nation of which he is a part also advancing.”\(^7\)\(^0\) Social progress, for Gandhi, will be possible only when social freedom is accompanied by social equality. What he talked about peoples’ Swaraj also emphasized it. For Gandhi, peoples’ Swaraj means a state of social existence where each individual irrespective of his religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, residence or parentage shall enjoy social status. He said: “Swaraj of my dream recognizes no race or religious

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\(^6\)\(^9\) Mazhar Kibriya, op. cit., p. 97

\(^7\)\(^0\) Cited in K. Munirathamn Chetty, op.cit., p.170
distinctions." He further said: "I believe implicitly that all men are born equal. All whether born in India or in England or in America, or in any circumstances whatever have the same soul as any other." Gandhi was also of the view that individual freedom should be sacrificed if need be, for the common good of the society as he is a member of it. Gandhi said that willing submission to the social restraints for the sake of the well-being of the whole society enriches both the individual and the society of which one is a member.

For Gandhi, Caste system is a major affront to social freedom. Caste distinctions imply superiority of one over another, weaken the minds of individuals. He said: "I do not believe in caste in the modern sense. It is an excrescence and a handicap on progress. Nor, do I believe in inequalities between human beings. We are all absolutely equal ... Assumption of superiority by any person over any other is sin against God and man. Thus caste in so far as it connotes distinctions in status, is an evil." Social evils

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74 M.K. Gandhi, *India of My Dreams*, op. cit., p. 249
like untouchability should be completely abolished and social equality should be ensured. The social hierarchy should be pulled out.

Gandhi was of the view that the Shudra or the Kshatriya or the Vaisya should be looked on par with the Brahman since the final goal of all is spiritual freedom. Gandhi also considered the concept of Varna as it was understood during his time as an obstacle towards the realization of freedom. The Varnas were originally equal and interdependent. The community depends on all Varnas equally. However, the concept of Varna was understood in a corrupt sense during his time. It implied inequality among groups of people. As he said: “Today Brahmanas and Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras are mere labels. There is utter confusion of Varna as I understand it and I wish that all the Hindus will voluntarily call themselves Shudras. This is the only way to demonstrate the truth of Brahmanism and to revive Varnadharma in its true state.”75 In other words, while he appreciated the system of Varnas in its original form, he was against the then hierarchical social connotations of the four Varnas during his time. Thus he was both against the then existing caste system and Varnas which resulted in the perpetuation of inequalities inside the society.

75 Harijan, 25.3.1933, p. 3
During the freedom struggle, Gandhi time and again stressed for establishment of Hindu-Muslim unity. "Hindus and Muslims should live like brothers because we have a common object to achieve. There must be inter-communal amity." He further continued: "By Hindu-Muslim unity I mean unity among all religious communities. I mention Hindus and Muslims as a widely-known example." Social freedom implies that the various social groups and communities should follow the ideal of peaceful co-existence. There should be real inter-communal unity based on mutual love and affection. As women represent half of the society, their position should also be raised on par with men socially, educationally, economically and politically. There shall be no domination of woman by man. For Gandhi, she is to "be respected as mother and sister in the society. She will have a unique and highly respectable role to play in the society. Social Swaraj will not be complete without due place and honourable role for the woman in the society."

Gandhi advocated the indispensability of education for securing freedom inside the society. He insisted on basic education as a contributing

76 CWMG, Vol. 45, p. 416
77 CWMG, Vol. 21, p. 428
78 S.H. Patil, op. cit., p. 41
factor for social freedom. He envisioned a society that shall promote all round development of all the individuals. He emphasized material prosperity as well as their intellectual development, moral upliftment, physical fitness and social elevation of the individuals. The ultimate aim of education is to train the individual for God-realization. Chhya Rai & Dashrath Singh observed: “Educational opportunity was considered fundamental to economic opportunity for developing non-violent democratic system.”\textsuperscript{79} And it is a non-violent democratic society alone that can provide adequate protection to the weak and the downtrodden. The Govt. under Swaraj of Gandhian conception will be democratic through and through not only in form but also in spirit and content.

(v). \textit{Moral and spiritual aspect of freedom:}

For Gandhi, moral freedom lay not in the egoistic assertions of the claims of the individual ego but in identification with the spiritual being. He was of the opinion that moral freedom means the conquest of the empirical demands of the senses and the appetites, for the realization of the transcendent self. In other words, moral freedom, to Gandhi was the

\textsuperscript{79} Chhya Rai & Dashrath Singh, op. cit., p. 93
emancipation from the slavery of passions. That is why he recommended the rigid adherence to the code of Mahavrata (the eleven great vows) in his Ashrama. The eleven great vows were: (1) Truth (Satya), (2) Non-violence or love (Ahimsa), (3) Chastity or celibacy (Brahmacharya), (4) Control of the palate, (5) Non-stealing (Asteya), (6) Non-possession or poverty (Aparigraha), (7) Physical labour, (8) Swadeshi, (9) Fearlessness, (10) Removal of untouchability and (11) Tolerance. Daily repetition of the vows was a deliberate attempt to strengthen one’s moral resolve.\(^\text{80}\) Moral freedom is correlated with moral responsibility. It does not lie only in restraining from doing bad but it lies in contributing positively to the welfare of society. There can be no freedom if the behaviour of the material body is determined by the physical laws. The element of ‘right’ is absent in it’s behaviour as it’s behaviour admits necessity. The principle of ‘ought’ is present only in moral laws because moral laws admit choice. They do not admit necessity. Physical laws admit ‘must’, and thus admit necessity. Moral laws can be overstepped knowingly or unknowingly. That is why moral laws are neither false nor true. Moral responsibility presupposes choice. When there is

choice, man feels responsibility, where there is necessity, man has to forgo choice. It implies 'must'. So, he loses moral responsibility.\(^8\)

Gandhi also talked out following traditions and social freedom. One may argue that the acceptance of tradition totally determines man's life and hence he is not free to choose his course of action. But Gandhi was of the opinion that an individual must not uproot the traditions in which he has been brought up. At the same time he pleaded for not following any ancient tradition blindly. He said: "Any tradition, however ancient if inconsistent with morality, is fit to be banished from the land."\(^2\) This means that tradition should not be in contradiction with rationality or reason. He also believed that human beings are the same everywhere. He who wants to will conduct himself with decency. There is no person to whom the moral life is a special mission. Everything depends on the individual himself. One can pursue the principle of morality at any place in any environment or condition of life.\(^3\)

Gandhi also talked about freedom at a spiritual plane/level. In his letter to Ana Suyabehn Sarabhai, dated 7.5.1933, Gandhi wrote: "I feel my

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\(^{81}\) K. Munirathnam Chetty, op. cit., pp. 158-159

\(^{82}\) Quoted by K. Munirathnam Chetty, op. cit., p. 160

\(^{83}\) Gandhi Vigyan, Vol. 3, No. 4, April 1993, p. 7
freedom as slavery and slavery to the God of Truth as freedom... Keep your mind fixed on the thought that the body is more fragile than a glass bangle and the atman which inhibits it is the only reality..."\textsuperscript{84} Gandhi had gone to the extent of saying that Swaraj was part of Truth. In 1940, he wrote in the Harijan thus: "I regard the winning of Indian independence by non-violent means as God's own part." He further said: "My national service is a part of my training for freeing my soul from the bondage of flesh."\textsuperscript{85} Moksha for him is "freedom from birth, by breaking the bonds of the flesh, by becoming one with God."\textsuperscript{86} Gandhi did not believe that one's moksha cannot be realized in one life alone. He did not want to become a cave-dweller to attain moksha. He wanted to achieve spiritual freedom amidst of his community and the mankind, and by serving his fellow beings tirelessly. For him God is not present in hell or heaven, but in each and every individual.\textsuperscript{87}

To Gandhi, one cannot achieve spiritual freedom all of a sudden. It has to be realized progressively. Since moral freedom is exercised

\textsuperscript{84} CWMG, Vol. 61, p. 115
\textsuperscript{86} Quoted in "At the Feet of Bapu", By Brijkrishna Chandiwala, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1st Edn. 1954), p. 29
\textsuperscript{87} Quoted by K. Munirathnam Chetty, op. cit., p. 168
progressively, spiritual freedom too must be experienced progressively. Spiritual freedom as a whole includes moral freedom. For him moral freedom is the means and the spiritual freedom is the end. As is the means, so is the end.\textsuperscript{88}

5.4 Relationship between Gandhi’s understanding of human nature and his concept of freedom:

For Gandhi man is basically a spiritual, and hence a moral being. As such, he believed moral development of man as one of the basic purposes of human existence. However, the realization of this purpose of human existence will not be possible if the individuals are not free. Because, morality consists in the voluntary, and not unforced, performance of good deeds. Besides, Gandhi believed that man, in order to realize his full potentials, needs maximum scope for self development which will not be possible if he is not free. Therefore, freedom became essential for the individuals. Herein lies the basic correlation between Gandhi’s understanding of human nature and his advocacy of freedom. For him freedom is a means to realize the purpose of human existence, i.e., moral development of himself as well as that of the others.

\textsuperscript{88} K. Munirathnam Chetty, op. cit., p. 169
Gandhi also believed in the basic unity and oneness of mankind. There is a unity between the individual and the rest of mankind. As such, the freedom of the individual is something that is closely related with the freedom of his fellow beings. In other words, man's freedom is irrevocably related with the freedom of others. For him, there cannot be individual freedom of a man when the rest are not free. That is why he was concerned with the freedom of each and every section of the society, rich and poor, privileged and underprivileged. For him, freedom is not merely independence from alien rule. His concept of freedom is multi-dimensional. It has also to do with one's ability to organize his or her individual and social life in accordance with universal moral principles. It has political, economic and social dimensions. He was concerned with total human freedom through a just and peaceful socio-economic, political, moral and spiritual framework. Freedom for him is for everyone. It is not only for the rich but also for the poorest of the poor. It is also not merely an individual right but is concerned with the liberation of all oppressed human beings, the collective 'moksha' for which he lived and struggled. He was concerned with all these things because he believed in the unity of man with man. Thus
his views on freedom are closely related with his understanding of human
nature.