INTRODUCTION

The Doctrine of *Karma* has a pivotal role in the conceptual framework of Indian Philosophy. It is considered to be one of the most important and fundamental tenets of classical Indian philosophy. Except the *Cārvakās*, all other philosophical systems accept this doctrine unquestionably. According to them, the root cause of bondage is *karma* and ignorance. Hindu eschatology also would be inconceivable without the Doctrine of *Karma*. Thus, an analysis of the traditional Indian religiosity necessitates a careful study of this doctrine.

Basically, the meaning of the Doctrine of *Karma* is that all the happenings of the past, present, and future constitute a continuous chain in which every link is necessarily related to each other. In other words, there is a definite causal relationship between all that happens to a man in his life. Here we confront with such questions as: Is man bound by his actions? Can he transcend the consequences of his actions? And, if he is bound by his *karma*, how can he be regarded as a free responsible being?
1.1 Objectives of the Study

Even though almost all philosophical systems accept the Doctrine of *Karma*, they differ in their approach to this doctrine. For example, the Hindu version of the Doctrine of *Karma* does not tally exactly with the Buddhist or the Jaina versions of it. Not only this, even the exponents and critics do not seem to hold the same line of interpretation of the Doctrine of *Karma*. Their analysis and characterisation of the doctrine differs from one another. Therefore, it is not very easy to cover all the philosophical systems regarding theories of *Karma* in a single study. In this context, this study concentrates on the Hindu version of the Doctrine of *Karma*, especially as it is expounded in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the authoritative text for Hindu philosophy and religion.

Though various interpretations of *Bhagavad Gita* have come to light, they have not brought out a sufficient philosophical clarification on the Doctrine of *Karma* and Freedom. The study contends that a real understanding of the doctrine is impossible without a profound insight into the notions implicit in the doctrine. The notions implicit in the doctrine are found to be the notions of responsibility and freedom. Thus, the main objective of the study is to unravel the notion of freedom and responsibility implicit in the Doctrine of *Karma*.

To the popular mind the doctrine spells fatalism. The so-called progressive thinkers have gone to the extent of repudiating almost the entire
philosophical heritage of India on account of the fatalism they discern in the doctrine. It follows that a careful study and clarification of the doctrine is a contemporary necessity. Therefore, the doctrine as it is understood today is very much in need of philosophical clarification.

The analysis of the Doctrine of Karma and Freedom is proposed to be undertaken in three dimensions. First, a clear explication of the complicated relationship between the Doctrine of Karma on the one hand and Freedom on the other. So the first objective of the study deals with the various aspects of \textit{karma}.

When analysing the Doctrine of Karma, we can see that the Doctrine of Karma is a corollary of the doctrine of rebirth. Hence, second objective of the thesis is a detailed discussion on the different aspects of rebirth.

The third objective of the thesis is to explain the possibility of Freedom implicit in the Doctrine of Karma. To this end, an attempt have been made to unravel the \textit{Hamsavayoga} (also known as \textit{paravidy}\textsuperscript{1} or \textit{Rajayoga}), a practical method of attaining spiritual freedom as found in the \textit{Bhagavad Gita}. Concentration has been made on the \textit{Yoga}\textsuperscript{2} or Meditation aspect of \textit{Bhagavad Gita}.

\textsuperscript{1} The \textit{Mundaka Upanishad} classified all knowledge into \textit{para} (higher) and \textit{apara} (lower). All positive knowledge, the knowledge of changeful many is considered as \textit{apara}. \textit{Para} is the knowledge by which the imperishable changeless reality (of the One behind the many) is realised. Here Yoga is coming under \textit{para vidya}.

\textsuperscript{2} Here the term \textit{Yoga} is meant not for physical training but for \textit{pranayama} and meditation.
Gita because the exponents and critics of karma theory have discussed the Karma, Bhokta and Jhana aspects of Gita only. This doctrine is scattered in the Bhagavat Gita in general and it is discussed in the sixth chapter of Gita in particular.

For the purpose of explaining Hamsayoga, I have been immensely benefited by the books written by Bhairavananda Yogi, Kulaguru of Swami Chinmayananda, who belongs to the school of Agastyamuni.

1.2 Methodology

The procedure most suitable for the above task is the method of conceptual analysis. The method of conceptual analysis is very important from the philosophical point of view to understand the intelligibility of the Doctrine of Karma. Indian researchers have attempted to give a conceptual analysis of the Doctrine of Karma. But in the process they have raised a number of conceptual issues which deserves a closer attention on the part of researchers. The study undertaken here is the extension of such a spirit. Parallel to this, historical, comparative, philosophical and scientific methods are also used wherever necessary. The review of the views of critics and exponents too adopts the same methodology.

While discussing methodology, we have to understand one thing that all sciences are searching for the unity. Vedanta discovered this unity in the Aman.
It followed its own method relevant to this field of inquiry. In science, the objectivity of knowledge is possible whereas in the case of religion personal experience is the only way of expression. In *Vedānta*, this personal experience is termed as *anubhāvam*. But in recent centuries the advancement of science makes a radical change by which the spiritual vision of the one in the many may be corroborated by positive scientific knowledge.

Earlier the scientific mind used to think that there is a possibility of impersonal knowledge. By impersonal knowledge it is meant that the knower can remain just a spectator. His participation is not needed. Not only that, but if he participates in the known, the very participation makes the knowledge unscientific. The scientific knower should remain an observer, should remain detached, should not in any way get involved in what he knows. But this is no longer the case.

Now science also says that observation is embedded in participation. Physicists say that atoms move in a different way when nobody is observing them. When you observe, they immediately change their movements. This is very basic, very radical, because the whole effort will depend on this understanding, the understanding of participation instead of observation. According to Swami Ranganadhananda: “*Vedānta*, as religion, it discovers the truths of the inner world, and fosters the same discovery by others; and as
philosophy, it synthesises this science of the inner world with the other sciences of the outer world. In the words of Fritjof Capra:

"The reluctance of modern scientists to accept the profound similarities between their concepts and those of mystics is not surprising, since mysticism – at least in the west – has traditionally been associated, quite erroneously, with things vague, mysterious and highly unscientific. Fortunately, this attitude is now changing. As Eastern thought has began to interest a significant number of people and meditation is no longer viewed with ridicule or suspicion, mysticism is being taken seriously even within the scientific community."  

Moreover, in India, any doctrine was acceptable only if it had the concurrence of three tests, namely scriptural evidence (sruti), reasonableness (yukti) and actual experience (Anubhava or Anubhuti). Our ancestors gave much weightage to the personal experience seeing that man is part and parcel of the universe and if he succeeds in knowing himself, then he can understand the whole universe. Thus our starting point is to submit to the dictum "know thyself".

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1.3 Review of Literature

An attempt is made in this section to review the available literature on the Doctrine of Karma and Freedom with a view to examine the different standpoint adopted by various philosophers and thinkers. Since comprehensive analysis of all available literature in the topic is neither essential nor requisite, only the relevant contributions are briefly presented.

Regarding the theories of Karma and Freedom there is a lot of controversy among scholars belonging to different systems of Indian Philosophy and also among modern thinkers. So this study makes an attempt to remove the vague conceptions precipitated on the Doctrine of Karma and Freedom based on the views propounded by Bhagavad Gita and in comparison with the study of contemporary thinkers like Swami Vivekananda, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and B.G. Tilak as specimens for the study.

Swami Vivekananda’s views on Karma and Freedom is scattered over his complete works. Even though Vivekananda establishes freedom as the very essence of the individual, his attempts in articulating the function of ego and the true self needs further explication which is illustrated elsewhere.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan’s fundamental convictions are deeply rooted in Indian traditions. The root notions of his philosophy are generally taken from
ancient Indian philosophy – particularly from the Vedantic tradition, but he has presented these ideas in to the models of Western thought.

Law of Karma, according to Radhakrishnan is not inconsistent with freedom. Here, he introduces choice as the assertion of freedom. For him, when an individual performs an action of his own choice, he does a self-determined act. At this juncture he considers freedom of the will and freedom of the self as one and the same. Therefore, this part requires necessary clarifications, which is done in the concluding chapter.

B.G. Tilak takes the notion of the self which is free by nature for solving the problem of bondage. We can see that Tilak and other exponents have presupposed the fact of human freedom in the sense that men are faced with alternatives like whether to do this or to do that. Thereby they enjoy at least a limited freedom of choice. Here Tilak's argument in the Gitarahasya considers as a specimen for examination which is carried out in chapter 2.

The above review reveals that most of the studies are conducted on the subject in a general manner, but there is hardly any serious attempt to study freedom from the stand point of yoga or meditation aspect of Bhagavad Gita. Almost all attempts in this regard are either from Karma, Bhakti, or Jnana point of view. Hence, an extensive study based on the yoga (meditation) aspect of Bhagavad Gita assumes significance.
1.4 Significance of the Study

Following are the factors which assume significance by the current study on the Doctrine of Karma.

An insight into the nature of man clearly reveals that there are two essential aspects in his nature, the physical and the spiritual. The physical is determinable in terms of biological, physiological and psychological facts whereas the spiritual aspect of man is not scientifically determinable. At the same time we can see that every individual is unique in his own way. This individuality is due to the karma of that particular being. Another aspect of man is his ego-sense. A survey of the life of an individual can clearly show that all activities in the finite realm are ego-centred – desires, motives, other activities – all directly or indirectly spring from egoistic consideration. All these aspects are coming in the study of the Doctrine of Karma.

Apart from these, the Doctrine of Karma represents all the issues that we are facing in our day-to-day lives. A comprehensive study on the concepts of karma, freedom and responsibility with reference to the related issues like samsāra, transmigration etc., enlighten us about the inner streams of this mysterious life. Even though many attempts have been made from many quarters to clarify the Doctrine of Karma, it is still a matter of debate.
Hindu philosophy always stresses that truth is the one which has to be experienced by oneself. Whereas in the case of Western philosophy the observer and the observed remain separate. Hence, the present study introduces yoga (meditation), a practical method by which one can get into union with the ultimate.

Indian philosophy gives much importance to the aspect of actual experience or *anubhuti* because one can attain *moksha* or liberation only through active participation. That is why, our *rishis* talked in similes, metaphors, parables etc. Hence, this study is an attempt to make the Doctrine of *Karma* and Freedom more transparent which is significant in all respects.

1.5 Relevance of Bhagavad Gita

The main reason for taking Bhagavad Gita as a special reference is that it covers all the notions contained in the Doctrine of *Karma* and Freedom. The notions such as *karma*, responsibility, freedom and determinism are elaborately discussed in different chapters of *Bhagavad Gita*. Besides these, various paths of liberation such as *karma marga*, *bhakti marga*, *jñana marga* and *yoga marga* are also discussed in individual chapters of *Gita*. *Bhagavad Gita* according to Swami Vivekananda, is the book that contains the philosophy of this age. *Gita* does not expound any exclusive creed or dogma; it does not plead for a sectarian view, but it gives an insight into life, into all aspects of man’s
experience, and teaches the technique by which life can be lived at its highest and best. That is why Sankaracharya says in the beautiful introduction with which he prefaces his commentary on the Gīṭa, that it is “the collected essence of the meaning of all the Vedās.” A study of Bhagavad Gīṭa is therefore of the utmost practical significance.

According to Bhagavad Gīṭa, desire is the root cause of all our troubles. Desire means the imaginations of the mind such as ‘let this happen to me’, and this is also called sankalpa. It is the manifestation of a restless mind. That is why Sri Krishna says:

“O Pandava, what they speak of as sanyāsa, know that to be the same as Yoga. For none become a Yogi without renouncing thought of the world.”

Different thoughts come into the mind. The thought for which there is attachment or aversion of the mind becomes a sankalpa (Pursuit of the mind). Without renouncing that pursuit no one can become a Yogi. There is no doubt that the world is meant for enjoyment. But before we enjoy the world, we have to learn the technique of enjoyment. This technique is described in detail in the Bhagavad Gīṭa, which is also described in the Isa Upaniṣad as ‘renunciation’. The understanding of the Bhagavad Gīṭa will become easier if we know the

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5 Bhagavad Gīṭa, 6.2.
6 Ibid., 2.47.
spiritual and philosophical background of the Upanisads. Without understanding the Upanisads and Gita, it is impossible to get an insight into Indian history and culture. Every subsequent development of philosophy and religion in India has drawn heavily on the Upanisads. The path of bhakti or devotion to a personal God, the path of karma or detached action, and the synthesis of all spiritual paths in a comprehensive spirituality, expounded by the Gita, are all derived from the Upanisads. The Gita is described as brahmavidyāntargata yogasūtra - the science and technique of Yoga derived from the science of Brahma, which arose from the visions of the seers, sages and thinkers of ancient India.

Moreover, Bhagavat Gītā is a text coming under the scriptural trio, the ‘Prasthāna Traya’. The three royal ways of welfare of mankind are known by the name Prasthāna Traya: one is the ‘vedic prasthāna’ called the Upanisad; second is metaphysical or ‘Philosophical prasthāna’ called the Brahma Sutra; and third is ‘Smrīti Prasthāna’ called the Bhagavat Gītā. The Upanisads are of use and value for the eligible only, Brahma Sutra are of use and importance only for men of erudition and learning, but the Bhagavat Gītā is of use for one and all. That is why this study considers Bhagavat Gītā as a basic text for the analysis of the Doctrine of Karma and Freedom.
1.6 Chapterisation

In the light of the above said factors and discussions on the Doctrine of Karma and Freedom, the study is schemed into five chapters.

The introductory chapter consists of various issues regarding the Doctrine of Karma along with the objectives of the study, methodology, review of literature, significance of the study, relevance of Bhagavad Gita etc.

The second chapter entitled ‘The Way of Karma’ is meant for the conceptual analysis of the Doctrine of Karma. The basic concepts of the doctrine such as Karma and Karma phala, Karma and Causality, Karma and Responsibility, Karma and Fatalism etc. are discussed in detail in this chapter. After the analysis of various concepts related to the theories of karma, the doctrine is studied from the stand point of Bhagavad Gita under the subtitle Karma and Bhagavad Gita.

In spite of their sharp differences of opinion and interpretation, all traditional Indian systems of thought except Cārvaka accept the view that whatever is done by the individual leaves behind it some sort of potency which has the power to produce happiness or pain either in the present life or in the future life. Here, the Doctrine of Karma acts as a corollary with the Doctrine of Rebirth. So, the third chapter of the thesis is named as ‘The Way of Rebirth’.
This part includes the relation between Karma and Rebirth, Karma and Prakriti, Karma-Vipāka. Moreover, it includes a case study on rebirth discussed in the book Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi. Besides these, Modern biology and Rebirth, Kirlian photography, Gross, subtle and causal bodies are also discussed. This is followed by a study on the idea of rebirth as we find it in Bhagavat Gītā.

Hinduism believes that the soul of man is essentially free. But due to the association of body, it is subjected to various kinds of suffering. Actions done without attachment or desire do not produce results or consequences, cannot bind the soul in the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. So the chapter four - The Way of Freedom - is devoted to the study of the doctrines such as Karma, Rebirth and Freedom, Freedom vs. Determinism, Free Will, Yoga and Freedom, Hamsa Yoga, Mind and prāna, prāṇāyāma and Gītā, Breathing and Thinking, Karma, Bhakti, Jñāna and Yoga, Yogic science.

The concluding part of the thesis - chapter five - scrutinises the relationship between Karma and Freedom in comparison with the views of the contemporary thinkers like Swami Vivekananda, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, B. G. Tilak and Sri Aurobindo. Freedom, in the light of yoga or meditation described in Bhagavad Gītā and the practical method of attaining it have also been examined in the concluding chapter.
In short, the present study considers mainly three aspects of man. First is the bondage of *Karma*, second is the problem of Rebirth and third belongs to the innate nature of man which is nothing but Freedom. The thesis also attempts to demonstrate that the real understanding of the very nature of the Doctrine of *Karma* has great potentiality to emancipate and liberate human beings irrespective of times or climes.