Chapter II

THE WAY OF KARMA

The ‘Doctrine of Karma’ is one of the most important tenets of Indian Philosophy right from the Vedās to the Vedānta of Śankara. The Doctrine is not only the foundation of Indian Philosophy but also is supposed to guide all social action of the people of this country. Ever since the dawn of civilisation, the question that most haunt the human mind is whether life on earth is rooted in certain well defined cause or not, and if rooted, then what is the said root. This enquiry of our ancestors led to the invention of karma. In the words of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, “Karma is not a mechanical principle but a spiritual necessity. Every act, every thought is weighed in the invisible but universal balance scales of justice. The day of judgement is not in some remote future but here and now and none can escape it.”

Nature, according to Hindu view, is relative and is a world of Māya.

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1 The word karma is derived from the ‘Kr’ dhatu of Sanskrit root which means to do something.


3 The word Māya - one of the most important terms in Indian Philosophy - has changed its meaning over the centuries. The basic recurring theme in Hindu mythology is the creation of the world by the Self - sacrifice of God - ‘sacrifice’ in the original sense of ‘making sacred’ - whereby God becomes the world which, in the end, becomes again God. This creative activity of the Divine is called līlo, the play of God, and the world is seen as the stage of the divine play.
which is always in constant change due to the influence of a dynamic force. This dynamic force of the play is called karma, means action. "Karma is the force of creation, where from all things have their life."¹

Now, our question is, Is man bound by his karma? Can he transcend his karma phala²? If he is bound by his karma how can he become free? Gita says: "All actions take place in time by the interweaving of the force of Nature³, but the man lost in selfish delusion thinks that he himself is the actor. But, the man who knows the relation between the forces of Nature and actions, sees how some forces of Nature work upon other forces of Nature and becomes not their slave."⁴ Both the modern physicist and Eastern mystic have realised that all phenomena in this world of change and transformation are dynamically interrelated. Hindus and Buddhists see this interrelation as a cosmic law, the Law of Karma. Law of Karma stipulates that there is a moral order in this universe. For Indian Philosophers the moral order and the natural order have

Like most of Hindu mythology, the myth of lila has a strong magical flavour. Brahman is the great magician who transforms himself into the world and he performs this feat with his magic creative power, which is the original meaning of Māya in the Rg-veda. Māya does not mean that the world is an illusion, as is often wrongly stated. As long as we confuse the myriad forms of divine lila with reality, without perceiving the unity of Brahman underlying all these forms, we are under the spell of Māya. The world of Māya changes continuously, because the divine lila is a rhythmic, dynamic play. The dynamic force of the play is karma, another important concept of Indian thought.

¹ Bhagavad Gītā, 8.3.

² Here Nature means Prakrti, a concept in Sāṃkhya Yoga system of thought. (Hereinafter Nature stands for Prakṛti.)

merged into one fact that is indicated by the Law of Karma. It is the moral order that governs the whole universe. The natural order is a resemblance of the moral order. As a matter of fact the moral order is the paragon of all orders.

2.1 Early Indian Thoughts

In the Vedic Philosophy, the Law of Karma has been recognised in the form of the ‘Doctrine of Rta’, Literally Rta means ‘the course of all things’. It stands for law and justice. Everything that is ordered in the universe has Rta as its principle. It is the law of morality and righteousness. Rta is the law, which pervades the whole world, which must be obeyed by all.

Philosophically speaking, we do want to reconcile the fact of change and sameness. The problem of sameness along with change has been in existence since time immemorial. In this regard, two widely different attitudes can be seen in early Indian thinking. One of them is known as Eternalism which gives emphasis on sameness alone while the other theory known as

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7 The words of Rta comes from the root ri - to move. Its original meaning in the Rg-veda being, ‘the course of all things’, ‘the order of nature’. It plays an important role in the legends of the Veda and is connected with all the Vedic Gods. This idea is similar to the Chinese concept of Tao – ‘The Way’ – as the way in which the universe works, i.e. the order of Nature. Both concepts, Rta and Tao, were later brought down from their original cosmic level to the human level and were interpreted in a moral sense; Rta as the universal law, which all Gods and human must obey, and Tao as the right way of life. Thus the concept of Rta at once a principle of causality and a principle of morality. Rta is the anticipation of the Law of Karma which is one of the distinctive characteristics of Indian thought and is a counterpart in the moral realm of the physical law of causality.

Annihilationism gives stress on change rather than sameness. These were the two attitudes, which were taken by some thinkers in the early Vedic times in India. Till then there were no mention about the Law of Karma. Later, the Law of Karma replaced all other theories as an explanation to the above problem.

Even though the Law of Karma replaces all former theories, it must contain in it all the aspects or the elements of those theories. The Law of Destiny, the Law of Nature, the Working of Time— all are included in one way or another in the Doctrine of Karma. It includes them all, because only then, it can replace the former theories.

2.2 Various Perspectives

Though all scholars declare the unique significance of the Doctrine of Karma, they are not sure when and where it has had its origin. The concept of karma is so differently interpreted by each school of Indian thought. While considering various perspectives, we have to consider the metaphysical basis of each school because the Law of Karma in each school is based upon their metaphysical standpoint. Here I would like to illustrate very briefly the different views of the working of the 'Law of Karma' that are upheld in India by different schools of thought.
Let us start from Buddhism. Buddhism does not accept God as well as soul (anamavāda). For them everything is in a sort of changing process (anityatā). There is no discontinuity (kṣaṇabhaṅga vāda). Law of Karma, according to Buddhism, is a dynamic doctrine and they explained the continuity of appearances in terms of the Law of Karma. We are trapped in a vicious circle where every action generates further action. This vicious circle is known in Buddhism as saṁsāra, the round of birth – and – death, and it is driven by karma, the never ending chain of cause and effect. Buddha was probably the first person who said that the knowledge of causes gives us an opportunity to determine the future. A proper understanding of karma and its causality means that we are free, that we are not bound by karma by nature and we can get rid of it. So it is in terms of the Law of Karma that this continuity is explained by them.

The word karma in the context of Jain perspective has a meaning, which we find nowhere else. For Jainism, karma does not mean merely a 'deed' or 'work' or a mystical invisible force. Here, it stands for a subtle form

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12 K.K. Mittal, *Various Perspectives on Karma and Rebirth* (Department of Buddhist Studies, Delhi University, 1990). p.9.
of matter\textsuperscript{13} that flows into Jiva\textsuperscript{14} (soul). In applying the same term karma both to activity (energy) and fine complexity of matter at the same time, the Jainas seem to anticipate the modern physicist's view that both matter and energy are convertible into each other.\textsuperscript{15} The latter view is further reinforced by the Jainas in insisting that karma in all its forms is nothing but matter. Moreover, according to Jainas, there is a beginningless association between the soul and the karma and its liberation is not in the natural course of things. Karma is said to be the very root of birth and death. Karma is the first and the ultimate cause of the universe. It is due to karma that the universe keeps on going. All phenomena, all changes, all manifestations are due to karma effects. The soul in the world is never without karma. A beginningless association between karma and soul is the starting as well as central point of Jaina philosophy.

The Sāṁkhya philosophy accepts reality as of two kinds - the purusa and the prakṛti. One is being or the soul and the rest of them are other than the souls. The nature other than the souls is ever active and that has got its own three constitutive characteristics of Satva, Rajas and Tamas. Satva, Rajas and Tamas are the modes of activity. Tamas indicates the tendency of dullness or inertia, Rajas stands for energetic and active tendency. Satva is for balance or

\textsuperscript{13} J.N. Sinha, \textit{op. cit.}, p 119.

\textsuperscript{14} K.K. Mittal, \textit{op. cit.}, p 10.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}, p 12.
equilibrium which represents the noble qualities. All these aspects are there in nature in general. The Śāṅkhya -Yoga like other systems believes in karma and transmigration. What transmigrate however is not the self, but the subtle body, called the linga śarīra which consists of eleven organs of sense together with budhi, ahaṅkāra and five rudimentary elements (tanmātras). This is a permanent annexe. Death and birth are mere change of the gross body and not the subtle. In the subtle, all our vāsanās are stored up along with past thought and action.¹⁶

According to Nyāya Vaiśeṣika system the world is a combination of multiple factors. Elements like earth, water, fire, space, time, mind and ātman or self combine together to make a man or a thing. God is responsible for bringing them together and then separating them. Therefore the ultimate creation or destruction is the work of God. Every action creates a potency and that potency, according to Nyāya system, is known as a blind force. They call it as Adhyatma,¹⁷ “The unseen”. It is an unseen force that is generated by all actions and this force is guided by God. So it is God who is the link in connecting the good act with reward and bad act with punishment in the form of good or bad rebirth.

¹⁶ Swami Gnanananda Saraswathi, Śāṅkhya Darsanam (M) (Anandakudeeiram, Kanyakumari, 1995), pp.51-60.
Mimāṃsā thinkers attempt to prove the Doctrine of Karma with the help of its doctrine of Apūrva. They say that our acts are enjoyed with a view to their fruits. There is a necessary connection between the act and its result. An act performed today is not bound to produce its results the same day. It may produce its results in the future also. But an act performed today can't produce its result at some future date unless it produces before exhausting itself to some unseen force. Jaimini terms it as apūrva i.e. something new, not known before, so apūrva’ is the metaphysical link between work and its result. According to them man enjoys the fruits of actions performed in the present life, with the help of apūrva. This is the substance of the Law of Karma.

For Sankara, individuality is due to karma, which is a product of avidya. The world we live in, is just the return of the work of the doer. The metaphysical point of Vedāntic perspective is that they uphold ultimately one reality, called Brahman. All manifestation is a mysterious appearance. They use the term Māya for that. Karma under this perspective is that activity which appears to be a definite activity, appearing to be initiated by a definite activity and leading again to a definite one but is an expression of that being which is beyond activity and non-activity and can issue into any activity or inactivity.

18 Ibid
19 Derived from the root 'Brīḥ' dhītu which means ‘to grow’, ‘to burst forth’, ‘to open’. So it is that openness which has in it immense possibilities.
whatsoever. The individual, for them, is a working machinery intended to produce its effects in the form of suffering and happiness. Moral life is always active and is never exhausted. It takes endless forms, owing to the variety of the demands of the conditions of human life. This process goes on for ever, unless perfect knowledge is attained. Perfect knowledge consumes the seed of karma and makes rebirth impossible. Freedom from the subjection of the Law of Karma is the end of human life. Even those tendencies with which we are bound can be overcome by the strength of will. Man is not a sum total of his impulses. There is the infinite in him. He possesses freedom with him. He can act according to his own choice. Thus history of man is a creative evolution.

The philosophical outlook of modern Indian thinkers like Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan also have ultimately their base in the Doctrine of Karma. But they differ in their use of the concept. According to Sri Aurobindo not only actions but even the thoughts and feelings have their corresponding result. Even the heredity and environment of a person are determined by the present and past actions of that man. And there is a continuity between different births too. Vivekananda also believes in the Law of Karma. According to him our actions produce

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tendencies—karma, in accordance with which our future lives are determined. He, like the ancient Indian thinkers, believes that man normally performs his actions out of ignorance. He somehow or other forgets his own true nature, fails to discriminate between the real and the unreal, and consequently performs his actions in the light of his wrong and false notions. Such actions create sāṁskārās or tendencies which determine his future nature.

According to Mahatma Gandhi, "every individual is unique because of his peculiar physical and mental inheritance and equipment. What an individual now is, is the effect of his actions—his habits of thinking, feeling, speaking and acting in the past. Man makes himself through all these diverse activities, internal and external. They appear to be so insignificant separately, but taken together they create tremendous forces that shape his health, character, and his entire destiny". But, for Gandhi, the moral significance of the Law of Karma appears to be more important because it is consistent with his moral convictions and also with his kind of faith in rebirth.

Karma is conceived by Radhakrishnan as constituting the essence of worldly affairs. He believes in the 'Doctrine of Karma' more or less in the manner of ancient Indian Philosophy that the soul has to pass through various

embodied stages and that the tendencies of each stage are determined by the ‘karma’ performed in the past.

All the above perspectives on the Doctrine of Karma show that the concept of the Doctrine of Karma is varied in each school and thinkers. The variation in each school and thinkers on the Doctrine of Karma is due to their difference in their metaphysical foundation. So, in this thesis I would like to expose various aspects regarding Freedom and the Doctrine Karma with special reference to Srimad Bhagavad Gita

_Bhagavad Gītā_, as Swami Vivekananda points out, leads us to a constant struggle to attain the highest, the struggle to achieve the eternal, the permanent, the immortal embedded in life and experience. Other races and other cultures have spoken of man as a dominator of external nature. Man, dominating his environment is a valid concept. The west has carried it to the highest level of expression. But this is not the highest that man is capable of; Indian thought will not accord it the highest point in the scale of human excellence. When man achieves supreme self-transcendence he finds that there is no body to dominate. He finds that he is one with all, for he has realised the self in all.

In other words he discovers himself as the Universal Man, integrated within and without, and himself pulsating in the heart of man and nature. The
Freedom of this Universal Man, out of the common men and women, is the aim of the Upanisads and Bhagavad Gītā. It is this that makes the Bhagavad Gītā of such contemporary interest and importance. So a study of this profound literature, the Bhagavad Gītā, teaches us how to make this philosophy practical in everyday life.

In Bhagavad Gītā, Srikrishna explains to Arjuna all aspects of life, which is nothing but Māya. To be free from the spell of Māya, to break the bondage of karma means to realise that all phenomena we perceive with our senses are part and parcel of the same reality. It means to experience concretely and personally that everything including our own self, is Brahman. This experience is called Mokṣa or liberation or Freedom in Hindu philosophy and it is the very essence of Hinduism. Is it (Mokṣa) possible? Or, if so, how can we achieve it? The answer to these questions reveal the possibility of Freedom in the Doctrine of Karma.

Before answering to the above questions, we have to go through ‘karma’ in detail, especially (1) the very meaning of karma (2) its procedure of working (3) various views on karma delivered by exponents and critics and finally (4) its connection with rebirth and freedom.
2.3 Analysis of the Doctrine of Karma

The understanding of the Doctrine of *Karma* depends upon what exactly we mean by the term *karma* or action. An action or *karma* is ordinarily distinguished from an event, in that the former has an agent, whereas the latter cannot be said to have any agent at all. For example, teaching is an act whereas raining is an event. Raining is a physical phenomenon that takes place in nature and can be adequately explained in causal terms without any reference to intention, desire or will and such other concepts. In the light of the above explanation we can infer that whatever a man does with an intention turns out to be an action. That is why *Bhagavad Gītā* always stresses upon the renunciation of the fruits of action, not renunciation of action. In the words of Srikrishna, "Your right is to perform your duty only, but never lay claims to its fruit. Let not the fruit of action be your object, nor let your attachment be to inaction".  

Let us consider the pure mental acts like thinking, feeling and willing. Are they acts? Or is physical manifestation a necessary ingredient of action? If it is so, then thinking, feeling and willing cannot be treated as acts. But, if intention is the basis of an act, then thinking can be treated as an act because intention is linked with thinking in a very intimate way. Therefore the

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22 *Bhagavad Gītā*, 2.47
distinction of an act from a non act or event is the conscious decision, choice or intention. That is why we hold a person responsible for his actions for the reason that it is he who takes a decision to perform a peculiar action in lieu of another.

But, what is the basis of taking a conscious decision or performing an action? When a person chooses an action in lieu of another, he gives his own reasons. It is said that freedom lies in choosing a particular action. But what does really happen when one chooses? One's desires, convictions, hopes, ambitions and even the world view come into picture while choosing an action. In Indian philosophy it is called as *sautkārās* or *vāsanās*. That is to say the *sautkārās* or *vāsanās* play a very important role and accordingly one weaves out reasons. So reasons for an action are really the external manifestations of one's desire, ambitions, convictions, hopes and even ideologies. All these show that reasons constitute the basis and the criterion of an action. In other words an action is that which a human individual does with a reason. In this view the action of non-human features can be questioned. If reason is the basic ingredient of an action, then animals cannot be said to be performing an action at all. To apply reason means to think of alternative mode of action. Non-human performance of action is event like rather than action like. For example, the weaving of nest by the weaver bird in rainy season is more of an event than of an action for the reason that the male weaver bird starts weaving the nest.
because of certain hormonal changes in its body at a particular period of the year. From the above illustration we can infer that an action is that which is performed with intention. How this intention work in human being is another question, which will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

2.3.1 Karma and Karma Phala

In the light of the above definition of karma, let us examine the relationship between karma and Karma phala or action and its consequences. What does it exactly mean to say that every action must have some effect? Newtonian classical mechanics tell us that to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. This principle can be applicable to physical or natural events which can be measured and presented in mathematical terms. Does this principle apply to action performed by human being? For example, take the effect of teaching. By teaching one seeks to transmit knowledge and this will produce some effect on others. But this is not what karma theorist mean by Karma phala. Karma phala is not the type of effect which is produced on others but the one which is meant to be reaped and enjoyed by the doer or the agent. How can we specify this effect? Let us name the effect of the action which is produced on others as X and the one which is meant to be reaped and enjoyed by the agent or doer as Y. The relationship between an action and X is causal, whereas the relationship between an action and Y is not causal. The
effect Y which has to be reaped and enjoyed by the agent is the corresponding moral desert of the action concerned. But the *karma* theorist are not aware about this. Any action that an individual performs, besides having a concrete and empirical effect, has a moral desert attached to it. It is this moral desert that the agent or the doer has to reap and enjoy. How to specify the moral effect? If the principle of retribution is accepted, then it can be said that one who teaches well enjoys its effects either in this life or in lives to come. In the Buddhist Jataka stories, the past lives of the Buddha have been portrayed wherein it has been shown that he (the Buddha) sacrificed his life for other creatures and this ultimately helped him coming up in the ladder of *Nirvāṇa*. Here we have to understand one thing that the ultimate goal of each human being is to attain *Nirvāṇa* or *Mokṣa* in Indian Philosophy. But without understanding the very meaning of *Karma phala*, the *karma* theorists generalise the principle to such an extent that for them a moral consequence either good or bad is attached to every piece of action. Further, for them, actions are either good or bad and the agent or the doer has to reap these consequences. The relation between the agent, action and its moral consequences is necessary. That is to say, moral consequences is built into the very fabric of every action and the agent simply cannot escape them. But at the same time transcendence of agency and action has also been visualized in the Indian tradition which will be discussed later.
What we are deriving from above discussion is that the Law of *Karma* is not a mechanical law of cause and effect. The mechanical theory of cause and effect works according to the law of its structure and fixed principle. But there is no fixed rule with regard to the Law of *Karma*.

Another question arising is that is moral consequences of an action like any other natural consequences? Can it be measured? The moral consequence ought to follow from the actions performed by men. But a man during his lifetime performs innumerable types of actions. We cannot know which action produces which good result. The Doctrine of *Karma* in this sense appears to be saying something which is causally operative but, as a matter of fact, it invokes a moral principle and seeks to generalise it so much that it brings the agent, action and its moral consequence to one inseparable nexus.

### 2.3.2 Doctrine of *Karma*

We have already discussed that the Doctrine of *Karma* has been variously formulated. But the most important formulation of it is as follows. (1) *Any karma* or action that a man performs must give rise to some effect. (2) This effect must be enjoyed by the agent; if not in this life then in the lives to come in future.
Let us now examine the effect of an action. This doctrine is based upon the presupposition that even after the action, its effect, if not enjoyed by its agent, continues to be there. Now the question is how and where the effect is stored to be enjoyed by its doer in subsequent of time? This doctrine takes for granted that life does not come to an end with death. Something that counts as the human person survives the bodily death. The Doctrine of *Karma* reveals that there is a subtle body (*Sukshma Ātāra*) in every human being which is also material in nature does not die with the so-called death of the person. The Buddhists term this as *Sainskārös* and the Vedānta and the allied system of thought characterise it as the *Jīvatman*. As a conceptual device it plays a role of moral consequences of various actions performed by the agent. But the subtle body also come to an end. Otherwise the cycle of *karma* will not come to an end. The Buddhists also believe in the twelve-linked cycle of birth and death. This is otherwise known as the *Jarāmarana cakra*

In one of its extreme formulations, the *Karma* doctrine tells us that whatever a person has, including his body and mind, is determined by his *karma*. Not only that an individual performs *karma* in the present life but also he has karmas to his credit from his past lives. Therefore, the never-ending cycle of *karma* comes to no end. In this context, certain concepts such as *karma*, rebirth and past life stand in need of explication. If birth is determined by *karma* then it must be accepted that a particular individual before birth had
performed some *karma*. Further, if the individual’s first birth was not determined by his *karmas*, the *Karma* Doctrine is not omnipresent. All the above analysis is based on the concept that *karma* and its *phala* is treated as a causal relationship. If *karma* and rebirth are treated on the cause-effect model, then the question of first cause may be raised. In a causal series, it is not possible to specify which one is the cause and which one is the effect. Because, cause in one context may be an effect in another context and so on. Therefore, to treat something as absolute cause or absolute effect is to violate the rules of conceptual operation. What we derive from this is that we have to think it over whether the Doctrine of *Karma* is a causal doctrine or not as the hard-core *karma* theorists say.

2.3.3 *Karma* and Causality

Is *karma* a causal concept? If not, to which category does it belong? Can we say that the actions that we perform can be treated as effects of previous actions and causes of future ones? It is argued by some *karma* theorist that every action gives rise to its effect and the doer or the agent cannot escape but enjoy it. But it is one thing to accept the thesis that there is a causal connection between an action, its consequences and enjoyability and another thing to say that a person is what he is because of his past *karmas*. The doctrine does not say that a man’s existence is determined by his past *karmas*; it simply says that a
man must enjoy the fruit of his actions. In other words, the doctrine makes room for the freedom of the individual. Here I would like to quote the words of Fritjof Capra:

"Many of the Eastern teachers emphasize that thought must take place in time, but that vision can transcend it. 'Vision' is bound up with a space of a higher dimension, and therefore timeless. The space-time of relativistic physics is a similar timeless space of a higher dimension. All events in it are interconnected, but the connections are not causal. Particle interactions can be interpreted in terms of cause and effect only when the space-time diagrams are read in a definite direction, e.g. from the bottom to the top. When they are taken as four-dimensional patterns without any definite direction of time attached to them, there is no 'before' and no 'after' and thus no causation."

Similarly, the Eastern mystics assert that in transcending time, they also transcend the world of cause and effect. Like our ordinary notions of space and time, causation is an idea, which is limited to a certain experience of the world.

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and has to be abandoned when this experience is extended. In the words of Swami Vivekananda:

"Time, space and causation are like the glass through which the absolute is seen... In the absolute there is neither time, space nor causation."\(^{24}\)

Again in the Words of Fritjof Capra:

"The Eastern spiritual traditions show their followers various ways of going beyond the ordinary experience of time and of freeing themselves from the chain of cause and effect—from the bondage of *Karma*, as the Hindu and Buddhists say. It has therefore been said that Eastern mysticism is a liberation from time. In a way, the same may be said of relativistic physics."\(^{25}\)

From the above mentioned scientific observations we can derive the following conclusion:

The cause-effect of an event is possible only within certain limits and within a specific system. Beyond that system it is not applicable. For example, we know the fact that the sum total of a triangle is 180°. But in a different system the sum total of a triangle is more than 180°.\(^{26}\)


\(^{25}\) Fritjof Capra *op. cit.*, p.207.

The above derivation is applicable to human action also. The cause-effect of *karma* theory is applicable up to certain level only. In quantum theory individual events do not always have a well-defined cause. For example, the jump of an electron from one atomic orbit to another, or the decay of a subatomic particle, may occur spontaneously without any single event causing it. We can never predict when and how such a phenomenon is going to happen; we can only predict its probability. This does not mean that atomic events occur in completely arbitrary fashion; it means only that they are not brought about by local causes. Since we do not know these connections precisely, we have to replace the narrow classical notion of cause and effect by the wider concept of statistical causality.²⁷

2.3.4 *Karma theory and Fatalism*

In the *Upaniṣads*, *Purāṇas* and *Mahābhārata*, we find several causal determinants of human nature and destiny. In it such acts are considered as acts of God, fate, *samskāra, karma* etc. All these concepts are accommodated in the theory of *karma*. So in its totality the Doctrine of *Karma* appears to be very complex. This has sometimes led to a confusion between Law of *Karma* and fatalism.

Law of *Karma* looks like fatalism because Law of *Karma* is a force which is taken to be a deterministic force and it gives us a deterministic understanding of life. You do this, you become that; you do something different, you become different. Our past doings determine our future behaviour, our future lives. So there is in a way determinism that is inbuilt in the Doctrine of *Karma*. There is some sort of necessity with which this law of cause and effect works. But necessity and determinism are one aspect of the Law of *Karma*. There is another aspect of the Law of *Karma*, that every *karma* at the same time may generate a potency, a force, a power to bring about something in future. At the same time the same potency can turn into actuality only under congenial conditions for that. From this we can infer that Law of *Karma* does not work in isolation. So it is not very simple, ‘do this and you become that’.

Let us consider the development of science. Science started in the early 17th or 16th century having an emphasis on the law of causation. At that time the scientist believed in the deterministic universe. They thought that everything could be studied under the law of cause and effect. But now, we all know that it is very difficult to point out a specific cause for a specific effect. This is because in order to say that this specific cause is responsible for this particular effect, we must isolate that phenomenon from all other phenomenon, which we are not able to do. So there are difficulties while adopting a deterministic attitude because of
the complicated situation that we work. This background we must keep in mind when we try to study the Doctrine of *Karma*.

A controversy was raised over the Law of *Karma* in ancient time. Those who advocated the doctrine of human effort rejected the Law of *Karma* and maintained that man is free and undetermined in his behaviour. They called the proponents of *karma* theory *fatalists*. The upholders of *karma* theory denied that they are fatalist and made an important distinction between fatalism and *karma* theory. Fatalism means external determination. In other words, according to fatalism, the conduct of man is determined by an external energy that is the writ of God or some supernatural power. But this is not the determinism propagated by *karma*.

The *karmic* determinism is the internal character formation of the agents because *karma* is the action of that very agent. He has chosen it and done it. Therefore if he gets its fruits, he gets what he has done. His *karma* is not something coming from outside like from God or some supernatural power.

Another view is that both the doctrines of human effort and *karma* can be reconciled. According to them, *karma* is not the only cause of events in the life of man, although it is one of the causes and a very important cause no doubt. Another significant cause of these events is the self-effort of the man himself.

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Even *karma* produces its effects only when some self-effort is made. So, both *karma* and *Purushakara* (self-effort) are complementary or co-operative to each other. A man who has to consider all of his circumstances in order to make efforts towards the fulfilment of *karma* is thus beneficial to the success of self-effort. At any rate the Law of *karma* does not prevent the possibility of human effort.

In modern times the above controversy has taken a new shape. A question is now raised whether the Law of *Karma* is compatible with the freedom of will. The advocate of the freedom of will think that the Law of *Karma* does not make any room for the freedom of will. But their view has been challenged and some attempts have been made to show that the Law of *Karma* is perfectly compatible with the doctrine of freedom of the will.

Freedom is the understanding of necessity. So our self is really free or unbound. Sri Aurobindo has stressed this view in his *Life Divine* in which he says “Spirit within is not an automation in the hands of *karma*”\(^{29}\). The Law of *Karma* governs the realm of our body. It does not govern the realm of our spirit. So we have the spiritual freedom or the freedom of will. According to Sri Aurobindo “Our self must be greater than its *karma*”\(^{30}\).


\(^{30}\) Ibid.

Prepared by Beehive Digital Concepts Cochin for Mahatma Gandhi University Kottayam
According to Bhagavad Gita, psychologically one cannot exist without performing action. So long as we are here, we can't escape from actions. Without work life can't be sustained. Man cannot remain without performing action in any state such as wakefulness, sleep, sound sleep or unconsciousness. The Lord explains its reason by the term helplessly by declaring that He has to act helplessly by the impulses born of nature. Many people regard only those actions as actions which are performed by the gross body. But according to the Gita the activities undertaken by the body, speech or mind are also regarded as actions.31

Every one is made to act helplessly by the modes of Nature or Prakriti because Nature and its modes are ever active. Though the soul is inactive, detach, imperishable, uniform, and unconnected, yet so long as it being attached to Nature and its evolute - the gross, subtle and causal bodies wants to derive pleasure. It remains helpless under the control of Nature. This helplessness of the self under the control of Nature is due to the affinity with Nature.

Individual nature is moulded by tendencies which are born of modes (Satva, Rajas and Tamas) and modes in their turn evolve from Nature. Therefore to be subjected to nature or modes or prakriti is one and the same.

31 Bhagavad Gita, 18.15.
thing. The same subjection on different occasion has been defined has subjection to time, Nature, action or prakrti etc. So long as the self does not become free from Nature, and its modes i.e. does not realise God, it remains helpless under the control of modes, time, Nature, pleasures and even persons, property etc. But when it transcends the modes of Nature and realises the self or God, it does not remain helpless, it attains freedom which is axiomatic.

One can't attain perfection by mere renunciation of action. What is necessary is the renunciation of the fruits of action. Selfish desire or motive must be avoided. Thinking is an act, willing is act, living is an act and these acts cause many effects. When it is said that work ceases for a man who is liberated, all that is meant is that he has no further personal necessity for works. It does not mean that he flees from action and takes refuge in blissful inaction. He works without any binding necessity. He who acts for the sake of action, all actions of that liberated man melt away according to our scriptures 32

How freedom is consistent with the necessity implied in the karma doctrine? If everything we do is the inevitable consequences of what we have done in the past, all moral responsibility should cease and self-effort should become meaningless. In considering this point it is necessary to remember that

32 Bhagavad Gita,4.37.
every deed that we do leads to a double result. It not only produces what may be its direct result—the pain or pleasure following from it according to karma theory—but it also establishes in us a tendency to repeat the same deed in the future. This tendency is termed as *sariskāra* and the direct fruit of the *karma* is known as its *phala*. Every deed is bound to yield its *phala*; even the God can’t prevent it from doing so. But that is all the necessity involved in the *karma* theory. As regards the *sariskāras*, on the other hand we have within us the full power of control, so that we may regulate, as they tend to express themselves in action. There is thus nothing in the doctrine which either eliminates responsibility or invalidates self-effort. The important point about the *karma* doctrine then is that, paradoxical though it may seem, it “inspires us both with hope and resignation at once; hope for the future and resignation towards what may occur in the present”\(^\text{33}\). That is not fatalism, but the very reverse of it

2.3.5 *Karma and Responsibility*

Analysis of *karma* doctrine lead us to explicate the complicated relationship between *karma* doctrine on the one hand and freedom on the other. If *karma* doctrine is explained in terms of cause-effect manner it would be deterministic in nature. Then, there is no room for freedom in the *karma-

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doctrinal. That will lead to the problem of responsibility. For solving the above problem the exponents of karma doctrine introduced the unity of self and Brahman. The exponents think that the fatalistic picture of human life provided by karma-doctrine can be compensated by accepting a non-dualistic framework in which karma-doctrine operates. Mr. B.G. Tilak, for example, is one among them. Now, let us consider Tilak's argument in the Gita Rahasya as a specimen for examination.

Generally, it was considered that the Karma-Siddhants have totally eliminated the possibility of human freedom from this theory. Tilak seems to take this position and he takes the notion of the self which is free by nature for solving the problem of bondage. Tilak distinguishes between māya srsti or karma srsti (the world of māya or the world of karma) on the one hand and brahma srsti (the world of Brahman) on the other. Unless, he thinks, human self is regarded really to be the member of brahma srsti rather than that of karma srsti human freedom makes no sense. The problem of bondage of karma can be solved or dissolved if this self is regarded as the member of brahma srsti.

Here, we can see that Mr. Tilak and other exponents have presupposed the fact of human freedom in the sense that men are faced with alternatives like

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34 B.G. Tilak, Srimad Bhagavad Gīta rahasya (M) (Sulabha Books, Trichur, 1995).

whether to do this or to do that. Thereby they enjoy at least a limited freedom of choice. This presupposition of freedom by the exponents may become clear by the following consideration.

The exponents of karma doctrine classify karma in two ways. First classification is into sañcīta, kriyamāna and prarabdha whereas the second is into nitya, naimittika, kāmya and nisiddha. The first classification is basically between two classes. One: past karma, which is subject to realization as far as its fruits are concerned. Second: the present karma subject to performance.

The past karma is of two types: one: sañcīta - which is done and stored in part, the fruit of which are yet to be realised and second: prarabdha, the stored karma, the realisation of the fruit of which has begun. Since actions of these types viz., sañcīta and prarabdha are only past actions, there is no possibility of freedom in the case of these types. However, the possibility of freedom seems to be there in the case of kriyamāna actions. Unless we presuppose an element of freedom in at least in the field of kriyamāna actions, we cannot talk of responsibilities, morally good or bad actions etc. Thus the second classification of karma into nitya, naimittika, kāmya and nisiddha becomes meaningful only if some element of freedom is presupposed in the field of kriyamāna karmas. This presupposition of freedom which is present

[36] Ibid., pp. 374-77.
behind this second classification may be explicated as follows. Nitya and naimittika are supposed to be obligatory actions. The actions that one is obligated to perform regularly are nitya while those which are to be performed on specific occasions are naimittika. Those actions, the performance of which is prohibited are nisiddha karmas. In so far as one is not under compulsion to act in a certain way, we may say, one is enjoying freedom of action. And the possibility of this freedom of action was presupposed while stipulating nitya, naimittika, and nisiddha karmas. In the case of kamya karmas, not only the socio-legal compulsion was lacking but the socio-legal obligation also was lacking. Thus the sphere of kamya karmas is the one where man can freely act on his wish. And the exponents of karma-doctrine have presupposed this freedom.

B.G. Tilak also in his own way presupposes this fact of basic human freedom. It is not either freedom which metaphysical self or Brahman has, but it is human freedom. Tilak accepts there to be two motives in man. One is the motive belonging to Karma-srasti. Let us call it as karmic motive. And the second the free motive of the self. Now according to Tilak, if on the occasions of doubt man chooses the free motive of the self and does not choose the Karmic motive, then his behaviour is in accordance with moksha - the absolute
freedom, enjoyed in the membership of Brahma-stri.

Here it is man not either body or self that is having a doubt and also choosing between the two motives. Thus Tilak also is presupposing here the human freedom of choice.

According to Tilak, if we think purely in worldly terms, i.e., if we discuss man and his actions without considering his relation to Brahman, then we are inclined to say that man has no freedom of will and he is bound by his karma. But our inner voice says that we can exercise our free will, use our conscience in making a choice. In the chapter on 'Effect of karma and free will' he proposes to answer the question whether our intuitive belief in freedom is true or false Here he tries to answer the question of human freedom in terms of freedom of the self, but he does not seem to have clarified this freedom as the freedom of the ‘ego-self’ as stated by Sri Aurobindo.

2.4 Karma and Bhagavad Gita

_Bhagavad Gita_ is considered by almost all sections of the Hindus as one of the most sacred religious works. A large number of commentaries have been written on it by the adherents of different schools of thought, but each of them explained Gita in their own favour.

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37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., p.373.
**Gītā** summarises the essential teachings of *Vedānta* and presents them in a popular manner. That is why it has become the scripture of the vast masses in this country. When we study Gītā, we are not merely studying the *Upāniṣad* philosophy, but also the ethical implications of that philosophy. A metaphysics which speaks of the highest reality without reference to everyday life will not be of much use to us. Therefore the sublime ethical implications of *Vedānta* are elaborated in the Gītā.

Apart from the ethics of conduct, there is another element in the Gītā which is bhakti or devotion to God. The bhakti of the Gītā is the expression of religious mood at its highest and best. It is the love of God out of the fullness of one’s heart and not out of its emptiness, as it is in its early stages. It is this that makes the devotee of the Gītā an embodiment of fearlessness and gentleness. The 12th chapter is a mighty saga in praise of the perfection of character through this path of spiritual discipline. While studying Gītā, we can see a strong affinity between *Īśā-Upaniṣad* and *Bhagavad Gītā*. Sankaracharva in his beautiful commentary described Gītā as the collected essence of the meaning of all the Vedas, *Samastavedārtha- sāra-sangraha-bhūtaḥ*.

All the great thinkers of India, ancient and modern have received inspiration from *Bhagavad Gītā*, which according to Swami Vivekananda is the
book that contains the philosophy for this age. Gīta gives us 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. It breathes the spirit of tolerance and universality. A study of Bhagavad Gīta is therefore of the utmost practical significance. The understanding of Bhagavad Gīta becomes easier if we know the spiritual and philosophical background of Upanisads.

The world around us is for enjoyment. In Indian philosophy it is termed as ananda. Higher form of this ananda is spiritual in nature which is termed as sat-chit-ananda. But before we jump into the world of enjoyment, we have to understand the technique of enjoyment. This technique is described in detail in the Bhagavad Gīta. From all these considerations the Gīta has assumed an importance in our daily life, and that importance is increasing day by day.

Before going into the Gīta proper, it is necessary to say a few words as an introduction. Most of us are well aware about the Gīta and its place among the scriptures of the Hindus. First of all, Gīta teaching are addressed to all humanity- to all men and women who are struggling to realise the higher-expressions of their soul.

In life, we have various desires and we want to satisfy them. Desire, from the psychological point of view, is the nature for a craving for fulfilment. Everyone of our desires is prompted by a vacuum in our heart, which craves
for fulfilment. All desires, therefore, signifies a vacuum in our heart. It requires an action outside to satisfy it. There are thus two stages preceding every action. First there is a feeling of want within, an urge which seeks satisfaction. This urge takes the form of a desire for a corresponding object which is capable of conferring this satisfaction. And lastly, there is the action for the satisfaction of the urge.

Psychology lists about fourteen primary urges of man like hunger, sex etc. Taking the most familiar one of hunger, for instance, we find its three stages (1) the urge within (2) the desire for an external object, and (3) the act of appropriating that object. The last stage, acts, ends in the fulfilment of the urge. When the stomach is full, there is no hunger, there is no desire for food, and there is no corresponding activity to satisfy that urge. Activity, therefore, is conditioned by the urge within and the desire for the corresponding object. In the absence of the urge, there will be no desire and no activity. Vedānta speaks of a state of perfection, free from craving desire, and desire prompted activity.

Here we can see the desire that lead us to do karma and in the Indian tradition, the Law of Karma has been conceived both as a metaphysical and as a moral law. From the metaphysical point of view it explains the metaphysical status of an individual in every birth. Man’s past and present karmas determine

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his future birth and its happenings. As a moral law it lays down the maxim of ‘as you sow so you reap’. Sri Aurobindo in a general way accepts the importance of *karma* both in the metaphysical as well as in the moral contexts. He admits that it is quite reasonable to accept this law. “Man’s being, nature, circumstances of life are the result of his own inner and outer activities, not something fortuitous and inexplicable. He is what he has made himself. Each man reaps what he sows, this is the law and chain of *karma*. 40

Fundamentally, the meaning of *karma* is that all existence is the working of a universal energy. All is a continuous chain in which every link is bound to the past infinity of numberless links, and the whole is governed by fixed relations. The moral significance is that all our existence is a putting out of an energy, which is in us and by which we are made. That is the philosophical reality of the theory of *karma* and that too is the way of seeing which has been developed by physical science.

If *karma* be a universal truth of being, it must equally be true of the mental and moral worlds of our action as in our outward relations with the physical universe. It is the mental energy that we put forth which determines the

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mental effect, but subject to all the impact of past, present and future surrounding circumstances, because we are not isolated powers in the world. The moral energy of our action determines similarly the nature and effect of the moral consequence.

Further the consideration of *Gīta* ethics naturally brings the problem of the analysis of the nature of action, volition and agent. *Gīta* seems to hold that everywhere actions are always being performed by the *gunas* characteristic qualities of *prakṛti*, the primal matter. It is through ignorance and false pride that one thinks himself to be the agent. In another place it is said that for the occurrence of an action there are five causes viz. the body, the agent, the various sense organs, the various life-functions and bio-motor activities and the unknown objective causal elements or the all-controlling power of God. All actions being due to the combined operation of these five elements. It would be wrong to think the self or the agent to be the only performer of actions. Thus it is said that, this being so, he who thinks the self alone to be the agent of actions, this wicked-minded person through his *avidya* does not see things properly. The philosophy that underlies the ethical position of the *Gīta* consists in the fact that, in reality, actions are made to happen primarily through the movement of

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41 *Bhagavad Gīta*, 3.27, 13.29
42 *ibid.*, 18. 13-15
43 *ibid.*, 18. 14.
the characteristic qualities of _prakriti_ along with the five factors mentioned, among which the self is but one factor only. So Krishna says to Arjuna that the egoism through which you would say that you would not fight is mere false vanity, since the _prakriti_ is bound to lead you to action\(^{44}\). A man is bound by the active tendencies and there is no escape.

He has to work in spite of the opposition of his will. _Prakriti_, moves us to work. Therefore no one can renounce all actions. There are no actions and no duties which are absolutely faultless. So, what can we do is to perform action renouncing the fruit of action. But a question may arise how a person can determine his actions, if it is deterministic in nature? The general implication of the _Gita_ seems to be that, though the action follows necessarily as the product of the fivefold collocation, yet the self can give a direction to these actions. This is possible when he wishes to dissociate himself from all attachments and desires by dedicating the fruits of all his actions to God. How can we achieve such a mental state? Is it possible? If so, what is the procedure to attain such a state? Answers to these questions come in the chapter 'The Way of Freedom'.

Now let us consider the nature of action. We have already stated that all actions are performed by the modes of Nature but out of ignorance a man

\(^{44}\) _Ibid.,_ 18.59-60
identifies himself with Nature and becomes the doer of the actions which are done by Nature. God has not made the doer. If he had made him the doer, the Lord in the eight verse of fifth chapter would have not said- the man who is united with the divine and knows the truth thinks, “I do nothing at all”. It means that this sense of doership is self made and so it can be renounced by the man who has inculcated it. According to Bhagavad Gita, neither agency nor actions does the Lord create for the world, nor does He connect actions with their fruits. But it is personal nature alone that acts. Here the expression ‘Na karma’ni proves that a man is independent in the performance of actions.

We can ask a doubt at his juncture. In the scriptures it is mentioned that the Lord causes those, whom He wants to send to the higher worlds, to perform virtuous actions while He causes those whom he wants to send to the lower worlds, to perform evil actions. Thus the above verse seems contrary to the ordinance of the scriptures.

Here one point we have to notice, in fact the scriptures don’t mean that the Lord sends them to the higher or lower worlds by causing them to perform virtuous or evil actions, but they mean that the Lord purifies them enabling

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46 Ibid., 5:14.
them to reap the fruit of their past actions by creating circumstances so that they may attain salvation.

If the scriptures are interpreted in the way that the Lord is the cause of evil and virtuous actions then the man will become dependent in performing action. So this interpretation does not seem to be justified.

When the Lord neither creates agency nor does He force anyone to perform action nor does He bring about the union of the actions and their fruit, how can He reap the fruit of action? For this Krishna answers in the following manner. “The all pervading Lord takes neither the sin nor the virtue of any, knowledge is enveloped by ignorance; therefore, beings are deluded”. From his we can understand that all actions are performed by the modes of Nature but out of ignorance man identifies himself with Nature. For example, the sun provides light to the entire universe and men commit sins and also perform virtuous actions but the sun has nothing to do with those sinful and virtuous actions. Similarly, nature and the entire universe receive power from God and with that power the people perform various actions. But these actions are not connected with God. He has given freedom to man. He, who, by misusing the freedom given by the Lord becomes the doer and reaps the fruits of actions, is bound. The Lord does not accept his actions and their fruit. But he, who by

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47 Ibid., 5.15
making the right use of freedom, offers his actions and their fruit to God, is liberated from the *samsāragrāmav*.  

In the 6th chapter Krishna says: “He who discharges his duty without expecting its fruit, is *sanyāsi* and a Yogi. He is not a *sanyāsi* who has merely renounced sacred fire and he is not a Yogi who has merely given up all activities.”

The feelings of egoism and attachment are man made. First a man accepts that he is a householder. But who becomes a sage, he says that he is a sage. Thus his egoism (I’ness) changes. Similarly, he has attachment for a thing, which he possesses. But when he gives it to anyone else permanently, he has no attachment for it. It proves that the feelings of egoism and attachment are not real but only assumed.

The man himself is eternal while the body and the worlds are transient. Therefore, affinity between the eternal and the transient can’t be everlasting. When he himself accepts this affinity, it seems to him that egoism and attachment are part and parcel of his self and it is difficult to renounce them. But it is wrong. This affinity is not real, it is only assumed because he himself is the illuminator and the onlooker while the body is the object to be illumined.
and looked on. The self is beyond space and time while the body is confined to spatio-temporal aspect.

The teaching of the Gita is based on man’s experience. While starting the gospel, Krishna, first of all clarifies that the body and the soul are totally different from each other. The body is transitory, unreal, limited and perishable while the soul is eternal, real, omnipresent and imperishable.

Gita says “For no one can remain even for a moment without performing action. everyone is made to act helplessly by the impulses born of nature.” Many people regard only those actions as actions, which are performed by the gross body. But according to the Gita the activities under taken by the body, speech or mind are also regarded as actions. Only those actions, whether physical or mental to which a man is attached lead him to bondage. Moreover, Krishna says: “There is nothing in the three worlds, O Arjuna, that should be done by me, nor is there anything unattained that should be attained. Yet I engage myself in action”.

The Lord is not confined to one world. So he is saying that there is nothing in the three worlds that should be done by Him. All men, beasts and

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49 Ibid., 2.11
50 Ibid., 2. 5.
51 Ibid., 3.22
birds etc. perform actions in order to attain something or the other. But a man deluded by egoism thinks that he himself is the actor. Here Krishna declares that all actions are performed by the modes of Nature, not by the self. Egoism is a state of mind while he (the self) is the knower of the state. But by ignorance he identifies the self with that state and thus he is deluded by egoism.

Then Arjuna asks: “But by what a man is compelled to commit sin as if by force, even against his will, O’ Krishna”32.

Answer to the above question Krishna says, “It is desire, it is wrath, born of the mode of passion, all devouring and most sinful. Know this to be the enemy here. A person holds that the worldly objects provide him pleasure. So he has a desire to acquire them in order to enjoy pleasures. This desire gives birth to attachment. So longer this process continues, he can’t get rid of sinful acts.”33

Here we can see that the root of the sin is desire for worldly pleasures and prosperity. He understands that he wants to abstain from committing sins but some entity is forcibly engaging him in sins. In the story of Mahābhārata on one occasion Duryodhana declares:-

52 Ibid., 3.36.

53 Ibid., 3.37.
"I know what is righteousness but I am not inclined to it. I also know what is unrighteousness but I can't get rid of it. There is some force in my heart, which drives me to act." The term Force used by Duryodhana stands for desire for pleasure and prosperity which force him to commit sin and not to follow righteousness.

When a desire is satisfied, it gives birth to greed; but if it is not satisfied, it gives birth to wrath. Whatever we desire, does not happen and whatever we don’t desire, happens—that is suffering. Desire is the root cause of all sufferings. Action without desire or intention is not possible. Then what can we do to avoid suffering?

When a desire is satisfied, another desire comes into the picture. Satisfaction of the second desire will give birth to a third one. Actually it is an endless process. Krishna is very much aware about this; so, He says:

“What is action? What is inaction? As to this even the wise are confused. Therefore, I will explain to thee what action is, by knowing which thou shalt be liberated from its evil effect (worldly bondage)."

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54 Garga Samhita, Asvamedha, 5.036.
55 Bhagavad Gītā, 4.16
An action is determined by the motive by which it is performed. Action can be divided into three groups, according to the motive by which they are performed which are action, inaction and forbidden action. An action undertaken according to the spiritual injunctions with the desire for fruit, is called action. The action, which is performed, being free from the desire for fruit, sense of mine, and attachment, for the welfare of others is called as inaction. Even a prescribed action performed with the motive of doing evil to others is classed as forbidden action. It is difficult to understand which actions bind a man and which actions liberate him. Even the learned men knowing the scriptures can't decide 'what is action? What is inaction? And what is forbidden action?'. Arjuna also finds himself in a sort of dilemma and so he thinks that the performance of his duty of fighting is a savage deed. Therefore, the Lord declares that mysterious is the nature of action.

Even though it is very difficult to remove the binding of *karma*, we can cross the ocean of sins by the boat of the knowledge of the self. Now the question arises what will happen to the ocean of sins which still exists. The Lord clarifies the point by giving another illustration. He declares that the blazing fire reduces fuel to ashes, so does the fire of knowledge reduce all

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actions\textsuperscript{59} (sins) to ashes. Actions are divided into three – 1) \textit{Prarabdha} (in the form of fate) 2) \textit{Sancita} (store of accumulated actions) and \textit{Kriyamana} (the present actions). But according to Sri. Sankara, a \textit{Jnani} has also to face the \textit{Prarabdha karma} which has been illustrated in his book \textit{Vivekachoodamani}\textsuperscript{60}.

A characteristic of all voluntary deeds is that they are preceded by a desire for something, which is described as their motive or \textit{phala}. Whenever, we knowingly act, we aim at achieving some end or other. For \textit{karma} yoga, the act should be viewed not as a means but as an end in itself. Krishna says: “Your concern is solely with action- never with its fruit”\textsuperscript{61}. An important consequence of following this principle of action is that one can act with complete equanimity. The term \textit{yoga} is in one place\textsuperscript{62} explained as signifying just such equanimity or ‘balance of mind’.

Considering the above facts we can conclude the teachings of \textit{Bhagavad Gita} on action in the following manner. The universe itself depends on actions\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Bhagavad Gita} synthesises both \textit{pravritti} and \textit{nivritti}. As

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Ibid.}, 4.37
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Prarabdham Baladvaram Khatavidham}.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Bhagavad Gita}, 11.47
\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Ibid.}, 11.48.
\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Lako yam Karmahasadhanah}
Prof. Hiriyanna says: "The Gītā teaching stands not for renunciation of action, but for renunciation in action. It is emphatically stated that Sanyāsa does not mean the renunciation of action but of interest, desire and attachment, it means the giving up of the fruit of all work."\(^{64}\)

We are bound to do karma. Then how can it be possible to do an action without seeking its phala. Here Gītā says: Only a true sthānai can perform nishkāma karma.

Renunciation is an eternal maxim in ethics as well as in spirituality. There is no true enjoyment except what is purified by renunciation. In our daily lives, in inter personal relationship, we observe that we achieve the greatest joy not when we affirm ourselves but when we negate ourselves. And in this teaching of Gītā and Upanisads, we have the explanation of this great truth. Through renunciation and detachment, we become identified with the immortal and divine Brahman which is the self of all. This renunciation is not mere negation, it is a negation leading to a larger affirmation. The dialectics of higher life, like the dialectics of evolution itself, proceeds through a series of negations and affirmation. It is the affirmative elements in this dialectic movement that constitute the positive content of joy in ethical and spiritual life.

The man who realise the self, says the Gīta becomes just like that ocean. He remains full and steady in spite of his own or other people’s desires entering into him

The moment I realise myself as one with all, a new zest comes to me, more intense, more pervasive and more pure. To make others happy is my happiness, to serve others and help them to achieve their life fulfilment is my fulfilment. This is the essential teaching of the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gīta. This is the basis of the metaphysical foundations of all ethics and religion

In this world one shows desire to live a hundred years, but only by performing actions. Man must use his body as an instrument to work and through work to create beauty and wealth outside, moral and spiritual development within. It can help us to attain the highest spiritual experience. In the Upaniṣads we find that the human body is described as the most valuable instrument that man can have. The best of music can be produced from this instrument, provided it is tuned correctly, disciplined and trained properly. There is a verse in the Srimad Bhagavatam in which God speaks to man thus:
"This is the intelligence of the intelligent, the wisdom of the wise, that a man attains Me the immortal one, here (in this very life) by means of the unreal and mortal- his psycho-physical organism".

This is the technique of religion, hence its insistence on the proper care of the body and of the mental functions that derive from it. The health of the psycho-physical organism is necessary for all achievement, worldly or religious. Properly trained and disciplined, this organism will eventually land us on the other shore of life- on the shore of illumination and immortality.

This was the positive, refreshing out look imparted by the Upanisads and Bhagavad Gītā. But after long centuries, it gave place to weakening and negative attitudes, first in religion and later in all aspects of our national life.

What then is the secret of coming to grips with life? The answer is: work but in a spirit of detachment. In life, we are engaged in so many activities, from infancy till death we are constantly engaged in some action or other.

Then, how can we uplift ourselves in this situation? The answer lies in the teaching of Vedānta, in the teachings of the Upanisads and the Bhagavad Gītā. If we want the answer we must face the problem. We cannot escape action by running away from action. 'Face the brute', as Swami Vivekananda

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65 Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, XI. xxiv. 22.
expressed it in a lecture on Vedaanta in London, recalling his experience, during his monastic wanderings in India, of an encounter with a group of monkeys. He first tried to run, but they chased him. Just then a passer-by shouted him not to run away but to face the brutes; he did accordingly. As soon as he turned and faced them, they turned back. Same is the case with life also. The problems of life are not to be avoided; they have to be faced. It is not escapism, but the very reverse of it. That is taught in the Upanisads. Therein lies its intense practical reference. Vedaanta is not only a profound meta-physics, but also an intensely practical science and art of life - Brahma Vidya and Yoga-Sastra.

The vision of the unity of the one and the many has tremendous consequences. It unifies the paths of Jnana or knowledge, Karma or work, and Bhakti or love through Yoga (meditation) and makes for a perfect character. The Gita proclaims this message as its central theme. “He who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction is wise among man, he is a Yogi and doer of all action” 66.

Based on the total vision, Upanisads and Gita gives its due place to aparva vidya as well as to parva vidya. The spiritual education of man must take him from the aparva to the parva. Thus, Gita teaches true spirituality for all-round efficiency - efficiency in the field of action, thought and contemplation.

66 Bhagavad Gita, 4.18
This total efficiency is the product of a total vision of reality, which Gita derived from the Upaniṣads and developed into a science and art of a comprehensive spirituality- Brahma vidyāniargata yogaśāstra.