CONCLUSION

We have discussed the Doctrine of Karma and Rebirth in general, and examined the different perspectives of Indian thinkers on the doctrine, its significance and objections raised against it. The Doctrine of Karma and Rebirth is a unique contribution of India to the world thought. Almost all Indian systems except the Carvakas accept this doctrine in one form or other. It is one of the strong pillars on which the whole Hindu philosophy rests. Hindu eschatology without this doctrine is inconceivable. Karma is conceived as the chain that ties man to the wheel of birth and rebirth. This cycle will go on till one gets moksa or liberation.

As we have already noted, it is in the Vedic concept of Rta, that the rudiments of Karma theory is found. Vedic seers used the term to denote the order and regularity of the universe. They believed that the universe is governed by an eternal law. This concept of order-or law governance could not be restricted to the external nature, but was extended to the moral and spiritual realms of human existence. However, during the Vedic period, the theory of Rebirth was not fully developed. In the Upanisadic thought, as we have already said, a more advanced view of the Doctrine of Karma and Rebirth, in spite of stiff opposition from different quarters, had developed. The Bhagavat Gita states, Karma as the true cause of rebirth. Following these traditions, the classical
orthodox thinkers formulated their theories. The concept of soul is central to the orthodox systems and it is on this concept that the Doctrine of Karma and Rebirth rests. It is the soul that transmigrates in each rebirth. Among the heterodox schools Buddhists do not believe in a permanent soul, yet they had formulated their own views on the Doctrine of Karma and Rebirth in their famous theory of Dependent Origination.

Modern thinkers, adopted their own, modified views on Karma and Rebirth. For, the concepts such as Karma, Rebirth, Immortality and Salvation continued to stimulate the modern mind also. Perhaps these thinkers felt that problem could be viewed and reviewed from newer perspectives. As we have noticed earlier, modern Indian thinkers kept on relating these questions to actual life and experiences. One of the major difference in views between ancient and modern thinkers is due to their different attitude to the actual condition of life. The ancients saw life as full of miseries and pains, so they longed for a liberation as early as possible, to end the miseries of present existence. Modern thinkers, on the contrary, consider life as meaningful. They go to the extent of saying that life gets dignity and significance through pain and suffering.

The Doctrine of Karma states that every action produces tendencies or impressions, and in accordance with those tendencies and impressions our future lives are determined. It is held that the soul with these impressions transmigrate
to the next birth. How can we prove this? The critics point out that the doctrine is a mere supposition, and that it has no empirical validity. Ever since the dawn of civilization, the question that haunts the human mind is whether life on earth is rooted on a certain well defined ground or not, and if it is so rooted what is the said ground? Man has been engaging himself in a perpetual enquiry on this problem. It is a fact that we find the varying disposition and disparities among individuals in our day to day life. What is the reason behind life and its diversities?. This question ever remains to be a riddle to human mind.

In our daily life, we find such inconsistencies as the birth of exceptional offsprings to normal parents, sane children to insane parents, wicked children to saintly parents. Further, a man of more talent can be seen roaming in the streets with broken heart, while a fool may be living in a palace with all pleasure-giving objects of the world. An innocent may be punished for crimes he did not commit. An idiot may become minister. Even twins, born of same parents, and brought up in the same circumstances and equipped with equal faculties, are not found to be enjoying exactly similar fortunes. Even the courses of life of these persons are not found uniform.

It is a common belief among the scientists that it is heredity and environment, which play a major role in man's existence in this world. Humans are born of human parents, elephants of elephant parents, and so on. A living,
being comes from another living being and never from lifeless matter. This property of production is common to all living beings as far as heredity is concerned. Human body like other multi-cellular living things consists of innumerable minute cells, which are responsible for its structure and function. Each cell is miniature organism and is regarded as the fundamental unit of life. As noted by Dr. Villee, new cells come into being by the division of previously existing cells. The cells as a fundamental unit shows all the characteristics of living things. Other than the ordinary cells, there are reproductive cells sperm and ovum, which are known as gamete. Each gamete is a single cell. It is believed that hereditary traits are transmitted to offsprings by parents through genes. Here a question raises, where does the self of a human offspring come from. The unborn self cannot originate from the male or female parent. Neither the body of parents, nor mind, nor any of the ten organs, has consciousness inherent in it, and so none of it can generate self. It is a spiritual substance. What an offspring actually receives from the parents are the rudiments of its physical body. These can serve as the medium for the transmission of the parents’ physical traits to the offspring.

In order to explain the origin and development of an individual, the scientists have had recourse to both assumption and chance. As T. Dobhansky

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says, a child receives one half of the genes of his father and one half of the maternal ones. The particular maternal and paternal genes are transmitted to a given child is a matter of chance. So also the kind of mutation occur, and when and where it occur are also a matter of chance. Modern biology fails to give a satisfactory solution to the birth of a genius or a moron. Out of the numerous sperms ejaculated at one time, one of them perchance meets one ovum, and brings out a new germ cell called zygote, which develops into an individual gradually. To say that the birth of genius or moron is the result of a chance of union of sperm and egg, is not a necessary explanation of a known fact. The attribution of universally observable fact to chance is the indication of one's inability to probe into deeper realms of existence. We have, many established facts in these sensible world, composed of the living and non-living, which can't be explained without the recognition of a subtle reality known as spirit, which is beyond the reach of senses, though it is graspable by reason and open to suprasensuous vision.

Every creature, despite the resemblance it bears to its parents and to other creatures of the same decent, retains its individuality. Each one is a distinct individual. The basic difference between one individual to another lies in their mental constitution, which is not acquired from parents. The radiance of the

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consciousness reaches the body through the mind and not vise versa. The mind and body being characteristically different, it is held that bodily traits belong to the body and mental traits to the mind. In this sense, the hereditary transmission of mental traits through the particular the particles of body of either parent is not possible. As Claude Villee remarks, the inheritance of mental ability or intelligence is one of the most important, and yet, one of the most difficult problems of human genetics. The prime factor in the origination and development of an individual is the individual himself. All else is subsidiary to him. This is particularly evident in the case of prodigies like Sankaracharya, Buddha, Jesus Christ, and the like. Evidently, the extraordinary powers of prodigies are not hereditary or environmental, or the interaction between the two.

We have examined in the preceding chapter the views of fatalists and determinists. According to the fatalists actions of men are predetermined by external circumstance which are beyond one's own control. Individual is a helpless victim of those external circumstances. It is also believed that there is a mysterious power whose workings are beyond the comprehension of human beings. This mysterious power affects man both internally and externally. Internally he is bound by the constitutional limitations which determines their

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mental activity, and externally, by limitations imposed upon him in his environment. But the fatalists have no explanation about the mysterious power or the nature of its operation. In this sense, it cannot solve the riddle of inequalities or disparities that we find in the universe. Determinists argue that all actions are determined by previously existing mental moral, physical or environmental conditions. But the determinists also do not explain why the fate of one man is different from an exactly similar man in the course of life.

Then what is the cause behind the phenomena? How can we solve this riddle? The only possible, somewhat reasonable solution, the philosophers and sages of India found is in the doctrine of karma and rebirth. According to the doctrine of karma, nowhere in the universe is room for chance, neither in the domain of the animate nor in the domain of inanimate. Nothing happens without a cause. The law of Karma on which the doctrine of rebirth is based is the cosmic law of cause and effect functioning on the human plane as moral law. As we sow, we shall reap.

The Doctrine of Rebirth maintains the identity of an individual throughout his successive of rebirth and deaths. One and the same individual appears as different physical bodies but all along retains the same self, which is separable from the body. As Swami Vivekananda says: “Such a Gigantic will as that of Buddha or a Jesus could not be obtained in one life, for we know who their
fathers were. It is not known that their fathers ever spoke a word for the good of mankind. Millions... If it was only a case of hereditary transmission, how do you account for this petty prince, who was not, perhaps, obeyed by his own servants, producing this son, whom half a world worships? How do you explain the gulf between the carpenter and his son, whom millions of human beings worship as God? It can’t be solved by the theory of heredity. The gigantic will which Buddha and Jesus threw over the world, Whence did it come? Whence came this accumulation of power? It must have been there through ages and ages, continually growing bigger and bigger, until it burst society in a Budha or a Jesus even rolling down to the present day. All this is determined by Karma, work. No one can get anything unless he earns it. This is an eternal law".4

According to the Doctrine of Karma and Rebirth, the birth of an individual is the rebirth of one of the many individuals who died somewhere sometime previously. Death is not the end of an individual nor his birth the beginning. It is maintained in the Upanisad5 that, at death, the self leaves the physical body, but retains the subtle body. All the impressions of actions belong to the subtle body. When a bound soul is ready for rebirth on human plane, the impressions of his karma lead him to the parents from whom he can secure the materials for his gross body. Being associated with food, he enters the body of

5 BhadraJyaka Upanisad, VI: 2.16.
the male parent suitable for his purpose. There he gets into the requisite sperm, which turns into a potent seed for his development as an individual. This is the seed that being united with requisite ovum in the female parent, turns into the zygote and becomes ready for germination. The fusion of sperm and the ovum required for its physical body by no means a matter of chance, nor is brought about by blind natural force. Behind it is the universal law of cause and effect in the form of Law of Karma. Though such a view is far from empirical verifiability, it remains as the only reasonable ground to explain the differences and disparities found among human beings. The science has nothing disprove of it inspite of the fact that there is nothing which proves it in terms of scientific evidence.

It is believed that karma which causes the rebirth is responsible for the diversities and inequalities in human beings life situations. But how can karma justify the inequalities among individual human being. Is man responsible for his actions? Does he enjoy the kind of freedom which is necessary for holding him as responsible for his actions?

As we have said earlier, three groups of karmas are recognised, that is, the accumulated, the fructifying, and prospective karmas. Karmas play the dominant role in determining the life situation of individuals. It is due to the fructifying karma, that each person is born with certain tendencies of body and mind.
Naturally man has no control over the fructifying karmas, as they are the results of the past actions, i.e., the past impressions that bearing fruits in the present life. A considerable portion of the karmas of the departed soul, having fructified, has brought about his present human birth with inborn qualities or aptitudes. This determines his present life, with its experiences of pleasure and pain. Man must face the consequences of his fructifying karma. There is no escape from their consequences. But we find that immorality, man is held responsible only for his voluntary or willed actions. He must face the consequences of such actions, since the freedom of the will is one of the postulates of morality. Law of karma is the application of the law of cause and effect in the moral world. No action is exhausted without producing its effect both in the body and on the mind.

While experiencing the fructifying karma, i.e., reaping the fruits of the past karma in the present life, a man performs new karma. It is true that the psycho-physical constitution and the circumstances created by his fructifying karma can create certain limitations, because according to the law of karma, even a single thought, word or deed has its share in making a man what he is. An individual’s character is the aggregate of larger number of minute activities of mind. It is something concerning his inner behaviour and it is the reward of various actions and reactions, attractions reputations, etc. So character is produced by karma, which in turn produces the will power. This will power is not hereditary or paternal, but it can be rightly inferred to have been the result of
man's continuous karmas. So the tendencies which have acquired through past life could not be avoided while performing new karmas.

Though the alternatives between which it has to choose are determined, yet the choice that it makes between those alternatives is not determined. What is important is not the actual freedom of the will, but man's consciousness of freedom. It is this consciousness of freedom which creates fresh motives. Though bound by limitations, yet his will is to some extent always free to make fresh motives. As Swami Vivekanda noted, "if a tendency is the result of repeated actions, the tendencies with which we are born must be explained on that ground too. Evidently, we could not have got them in this life; therefore we must have to seek for their genesis in the past. Now it is also evident that some of our tendencies are the effects of the self conscious efforts peculiar to man; and if it is true that we are born with such tendencies, it rigorously follows that their causes were conscious efforts in the past- that is, we must have been or the mental plane, which we call the human plane, before this present life".

In choosing between alternatives two courses are open to man. In one case, he may follow his tendencies created by his past karmas and in the other case, he may struggle against them. We can say that his external situation and his inner tendencies are determined. But even then there is a little scope for the free

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will, due to which man can make progress or retrogression as he likes. Using this freedom he can arrange his course of actions and destiny as he likes or as he determines. For instance, a student after passing an examination after hard labour, will exercise his own free will to decide whether to join a college for higher studies, or to get a job, or to engage himself in some business. It is true that even such action will be in accordance with his character and tendencies, but the choice of performing act is there with the agent himself.

Man can make amends for his accumulated karma, and has control over his prospective karma. A classical example of a bowman with a quiver of arrow is very well illustrates man’s control over his actions. The bowman has no control over the arrow which he has already shot at his target. This is analogous to fructifying karma. But another arrow which the bowman has fixed to the bow and is about to shoot, he can throw away it if he chooses to do so, which is analogous to prospective karma. The bowman can discard the whole quiver of arrows he has on his back, if he so chooses. This is the illustration of man’s control over accumulated karmas.

In this sense we can conclude that man is the maker of his own destiny. In order to make his destiny he always possesses a relative freedom although there is no absolute freedom. This relative freedom is enough to make his own decision, upon the alternatives, in shaping his destiny as he likes. Thus Swami
Vivekananda says "Each one of us is the maker of his own fate... We, we and nonelse, are responsible for what we suffer. We are the effects, and we are the causes. We are free therefore. If I am unhappy, it has been of my own making, and that very thing show that I can be happy if I will. If I am impure, that is also my own making and that very thing shows that I can be pure if I will".

We can say that the conditions of our present life are the consequences of a self conscious efforts in the past lives. For, in the past lives also, we had sufficient freedom. Again, the external situation and tendencies are also the results of self conscious efforts of the individuals. So these are his own creations. Though there is no satisfactory answer to the question the about the origin of the bondage of the soul, almost all philosophical systems in India have got reasonable solutions as to how and why it fell into the bondage. However, our intention here is not to involve ourselves in to such perplexing issues. The soul as intrinsically pure and its bondage to be beginningless are the basic truths assumed in almost all systems of philosophy. The present work on Karma and Rebirth is meticulously performed accepting these assumptions as true.

To sum up, the inequalities and diversities are due to karma. As the karma, so the rebirths, i.e., in accordance with the karmas, corresponding rebirths occur. Again corresponding to the actions of individuals, rebirths vary from

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7 Swami Vivekananda, Complete works, Vol 3. P. 125
person to person. This makes inequalities. In his actions, man has enough freedom, though tendencies of past create hurdles on the exercise of his freedom. This freedom is enough to choose the right course of action among the alternatives and to make fresh motives. Every life situation is the effect of the conscious efforts of individual in the past. Hence it may be safely said that the inequalities and disparities we find among individuals are the effects of the self conscious efforts of individuals themselves. He is the maker of his own destiny. None else is held responsible for his actual condition. If he uses his freedom in the right direction, he would enjoy the goodness of life and if he does not, the reverse would be the result. In short, man always possesses the vivacity, the variety and capacity to change his life as he wills.