INTRODUCTION

The Doctrine of Karma and Rebirth is one of the cardinal concepts in the tradition of Indian philosophy. Almost all the systems of Indian thought except Carvaka materialism, accept this doctrine in one form or the other. The role of karma has been exceptionally significant for Indian thought and its influence on the Indian mind is profound and far reaching that it has been regarded as the back bone of Indian philosophy. The Sanskrit term Karma is derived from the root ‘kri’ means ‘to do’. Hence the etymological meaning of the term Karma is deed, work or action and designates any kind of work. The word rebirth means ‘punarjanma’, ‘referring to a succession of births’. It is believed in Indian philosophical systems that karma is the chain that ties man to the wheel of birth and rebirth. Thus rebirth is understood as the corollary of individual actions. Hence karma without rebirth is incomplete, and rebirth without karma is irrelevant. Both are interrelated.

During the early stages of Indian thought karma came to denote religious offerings and sacrifices performed in order to attain the blessings of gods and to expedite for the sins of one’s own and his ancestors. Thus it seems that even before the full development of the doctrine of Karma, the term had acquired enough of religious connotations. In later periods, it had become a full fledged doctrine developing itself into a logical, metaphysical and moral principle. As a
logical principle, it stood for the strict causal necessity between actions and their consequences, as a metaphysical principle, it established the immortality of the soul, and as a moral one it explained the diversity in the destiny of men in regard to their character and fortunes.

The Doctrine of Karma is generally understood as a theory which holds that all actions good or bad produce their impressions, which has the power to ordain for him happiness or sorrow in future, depending on whether it is good or bad. In other words, every deed that one performs has its effects in the world and forms with in the doer tendencies which becomes the foundation of his future deeds. Karmas set forth the relation between one’s actions as a jeewa, and one’s state of being. Sometimes the law of karma is understood not merely in terms of moral causation. It is identified with a universal principle of causality which applies to all existent entities, human and non-human, in an inviolable manner. As the fruits of the action cannot be fully enjoyed in the present life, one has to take further births in order to exhaust them. The act passes away as soon as it is done, but its moral effect is treasured in a potential form, in order to bear fruit in a future life. The law helps us to explain certain differences in individual beings, which cannot be explained by other known theories.

A doer of the action or a kartā is one who does or performs actions all brings about changes in the existing states of affairs. The notion of kartā has no
meaning in isolation. Its meaning consists in activity and activity has no meaning outside the contest of action. The notion of karma essentially involves in it the notion of a conscious agency in the sense that without conscious agency no karma is possible. Only conscious beings can be said to have the power to bring about action or to refrain from it. Since ‘karma phala’ (result/consequences of action) is essentially connected with karma and karma is essentially connected with kartā, ‘karma phala’ is not conceivable without karma and kartā. Kartā and Karma are inevitable and sufficient condition for ‘karma phala’ to happen. In this sense, one who performs karma can legitimately be led to be morally responsible and accountable for what he does, good or bad. A kartā has no control over the actual result of an action. He has control only over action and action alone which he performs to attain the desired ends.

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 subject to the Law of Karma, because it is the aggregate of a large number of minute activities of mind. It is something concerning his inner behavior and it is the reward of various actions and reactions, attractions and repulsions, which reflect and produce in us various exclamations such as laughing, and weeping, pleasure and distress, joy and sorrow, blessing and curse, etc. Thus character is produced by karmas, which in turn produce the will power. This will power is not hereditary or paternal or attained in one birth alone, but it can be rightly inferred to have
been the result of man’s strenuous karmas of many continuous lives. Each
character is the aggregate result of previous mental actions and is also the cause
of future changes in the character. Thus a man’s present condition is the result of
all his past deeds. Similarly his future condition will be the result of his past and
present actions.

According to J.N. Farquhar the word karma means “literally, action but in
the doctrine means the inevitable working out of action in new life. The idea is
that a man’s body, action, capacities and temperament, his birth, wealth and
station and the whole of his experiences in life, whether of happiness or of
sorrow together form the just recompense for this deeds, good and bad, done in
earlier existences.”

According to the intensity of effects, karmas are classified into three
groups.

1. The accumulated (sañcita) karma, the stored up latent impressions of the past
    that will fructify in a future life or lives.

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2. The fructifying (prārabdha) karma, the past impressions that are bearing fruit in the present life. In other words, out of the past action collected in the series of the past lives, those actions which have began to manifest by influencing man’s mind and the course of his expression during his present life, termed prārabdha karma, which has been the cause of present birth, body and character.

3. Prospective (Āgāmi) karma, the impressions of the current activities that are accumulating and will fructify in due course.

The primary purpose of the Law of Karma seems to be to emphasis the importance of human conduct. Man is a being who continually shapes his destiny through his own deeds, words and thoughts. Every action he does has its own definite consequences in his personality. It is believed that the Law of Karma is the application of the Law of cause and effect in the moral world. No action is exhausted without producing its effects both in the body and the mind. Sometimes the Law of Karma is interpreted as the law of the conservation of moral energy. It is said that the Law of karma is the law of conservation of moral values, merits and demerits of action. This law of conservation means that there is no loss of the effects of work done and that there is no happening of events to a

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4 S.C. Chatterjee and D.M. Datta, An Introduction to Indian Philosophy, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1984, p. 15.
person except as the result of his own work.\textsuperscript{5} Das Gupta remarks on Karma that 'what ever action is done by an individual leaves behind it some sort of potency, which has the power to ordain for him joy or sorrow in future, according as it is good or bad.\textsuperscript{6}

The Principle of Karma is based on the clearest insight into the relation of cause and effect. Every action produces external and internal effects. The inner effect takes the form of disposition or samāskāra. A good deed produces disposition or samāskāra, which has the capacity to give happiness to the individual. A bad deed produces samāskāra, which has the capacity to give suffering to the individual. It is a theory primarily relating to the voluntary actions of human beings and their vital aftermath. As stated by Prof. Hiriyanna, "in the first place, the doctrine (of karma) extends the principle of causation to the sphere of human conduct and teaches that, as every event in the physical world is determined by its antecedents, so everything happens in the moral reaction is pre-ordained".\textsuperscript{7}

So the Law of Karma is looked upon as the ever-abiding moral principle, according to which every voluntary action would inevitably produce its right consequences for the agent. One becomes what he is by virtue of what he does

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., p.15.
\textsuperscript{6} S.N. Das Gupta, \textit{A History of Indian Philosophy}, Vol. 1, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1975, p.71.
\textsuperscript{7} M. Hiriyanna, \textit{The Essentials of Indian Philosophy}, George Allen and Unwin (India) Pvt. Ltd., Bombay, 1973, p.46.
and how he behaves. Sri. Aurobindo remarked thus: "Karma is not merely a mechanical law of antecedent and consequence. Karma is action, there is a thing done, and a doer and an active consequence, these three are the three joints, the three locks, the three 'Sandhis' of the connexus of Karma."®

It is the Law of Karma that necessitates the continued existence of man since he does not reap the full consequences of his action in one life's span. An individual's present birth is actually a case of rebirth. The Doctrine of Karma is applied only to the individual soul, which is in bondage to the phenomenal world and not to the self as Ultimate Reality. In fact, according to the view of orthodox Indian thinkers it is estrangement and bondage of the individual soul which lead it to the subjection to the Doctrine of Karma. No action disappears without producing its consequences. This is considered as the law of nature itself and as such no one can prevent it. As you sow, so you reap. According to Bhagavat Gita, human body is the kshetra or field in which one sows, the seeds of his desires and reap their fruits.®

The world, in brief, turns out of the kingdom of karma, since it is the realm of the eternal moral law. "The unending procession of unnumbered soul," observes by J.N. Farquhar, "constantly passing through birth and death as plants,

animals, men, demons or Gods, is held to be not only the explanation of human sorrow, joy and character, but of all that happens in the material world. Everything that visible is the outworking of the action of the whole vast assembly of invisible souls. Karma is the law of the phenomenal world."\(^{10}\)

In short, the Doctrine of Karma states a conjunction of following things. (1) Every action produces some result which may be either pleasurable or painful no matter whether it is moral or immoral, vedic or non-vedic, religious or non-religious, good or bad. (2) The doer of action necessarily experiences or realises the result of his or her action in the present or next life. (3) The doer of the action deserves the result of action because of his or her action. Thus M. Hiriyanna argues that transmigration is a necessary corollary of the Law of Karma.\(^{11}\)

J.N. Faquhar defines the Doctrine of Transmigration thus. "The Doctrine of Transmigration is that souls are emanations of the divine spirit, sparks from the central force, drops from the ocean of divinity, that each soul is incarnated in a body times without number; that the same soul may be in one life a God, in another a man, in a third an animal, or even a plant, and that the series of births and deaths goes on in a never ending cycle, the soul finding no rest nor relief.


\(^{11}\) M. Hiriyanna, Op cit 7, p.47.
from suffering unless it finds some means of release from the necessity of rebirth and returns to the divine source whence it came.”

One who believes in the Doctrine of Transmigration of soul is bound to believe in *samsāra*. The Sanskrit word *samsāra* has the original sense of a ‘flowing with or together’. Those who translate the word *samsāra* as transmigration, reincarnation, metempsychosis, rebirth and the round of birth and death, for them, *samsāra* is a beginningless or ever recurring series of births and deaths. It is bondage to the embodied life in spatio-temporal world. For them rebirth, metempsychosis, transmigration and *samsāra* are synonymous terms. The notion of transmigration and rebirth are conceptually linked with the notion of *samsāra* in the sense that with out perpetual existence transmigration or rebirth is not possible. But when we go into the analysis of the notion of *samsāra* we find that it is different from the notions of transmigration and rebirth.

What constitutes the meaning of *samsāra* is a ceaseless process or change or continuity, which does not by it self involve in its meaning the notion of identity, persistence, permanency and stability of a thing of the *samsāra*. It doesn’t necessarily involve in its meaning the substantial and essential identity of a thing which can be said remains unchanged in the process of flow or change.

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12 J.N. Farqhar, *Op cit* 1, p. 137.
This implies that the notion of *samsāra* is conceptually and essentially linked with the notions of succession, change, flow or gliding but not with a notion of identity, stability, permanency and persistency of a thing with which the notions of transmigration, or reincarnation or rebirth of a soul is essentially connected with. The notion of *samsāra* is based on the theory of inflow or change involves in it a reference to preceding and succeeding events and it goes on continuing without involving the notion of eternity or identity of anything. This means that one who believes in *samsāra* is not necessarily bound to believe in the identity of a thing belonging to the *samsāra*. The transmigration of the soul with karmic residues assumes the identity of actor and action in the continuity of the series of life. But the notion of continuity or flux with which the notion of *samsāra* is essentially linked precludes the notion of identity. This does not amount to mean that the notion of identity is incompatible with the notion of *samsāra*.

The identity of the agent is possible to conceive through the changes of his characteristics acquired by his deeds, good or bad. The notion of identifying involves in it the idea that the existence of the one and the same thing at different times. The problem of inconsistency in regard to the notion of identity and *samsāra* arises because of not understanding the scope of the predication involved in the phrase ‘one and the same’. The identity predicates are attributed to the agent and his *karma phala*. To attribute the identity predicates to the agent and his *karma phala* does not amount to mean that the agent cannot acquire the
new karmic characteristics through his deeds, nor does it mean that he cannot leave the acquired karmic characteristics of the past or the present deeds. At different times in the continued series of lives, the agent can acquire different karmic characteristics and these characteristics in turn contingently may constitute the criterion of the identity of the agent in the continuous series of change. Transmigration is not possible without believing in *samsāra* because it is the karmic *samsāra* in which the transmigration of phenomenal *jiva* takes place.

While, before we explain the nature and the process of rebirth as generally discussed in Indian traditions, we have to discuss first something about the three-fold body and five-fold sheaths of the psycho-physical vehicle of the self. Besides the physical body, every individual has two more bodies - the subtle and the casual, which are more potent, though invisible.\(^\text{14}\) It is said that the five organs of perception, five organs of actions, with the help of these we deal with outer world, are evidently located in the physical body. After death, the physical body is left behind.

Subtle body is nothing but a minute germ of a living substance.\(^\text{15}\), which possesses impression of the various actions in a potential state just as the seed of a plant contains in it the life force and the power of growth. The subtle body is

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the undergarment of the soul, and the gross physical body is the outer garment. Casual body is the seat of the experiences of dreamless sleep. It is the innermost of all the three.

All the three constitute the five-fold sheath or covering of the self, which is distinct from both. The five-fold sheaths are Annamaya Kośa or Food sheath, Pranamaya Kośa or Vital-Air sheath, Manomaya Kośa or Mental sheaths, Vijnanamaya Kośa or Intellectual sheath and Anandamaya Kośa or Blissful sheath. They are successively finer and finer. The first one is the outer most and grossest. And the last one the inner most and finest of them all.

Food sheath is so called because it has come up from the essence of the food and it exists because of the food taken in and ultimately after death, it must go back become food again. The organ of knowledge and organ of action exist in this sheath. The Vital-Air sheath consists of air that we breath in get mixed up with blood and reaches every cell of the physical body and it controls all the organs of action. The Mental sheath, which is the sheath of mind, entertains our doubts, joys and the like emotions. Mind is the doubting element. Manas with cognitive sense is called the Manomaya Kośa. The Intellectual sheath is considered subtler than the mind because it adventures forth into realms farther than what it had heard or seen before. Buddhi with cognitive sense is Vijnanamaya Kośa. The Blissful sheath is considered blissful because,
whatever be the condition in which individuals are, waking or dream states, once they reach the hall of sleep, be they rich or poor, successful or disappointed, healthy or sick, young or old, all of them experience same undisturbed peace and bliss.\textsuperscript{16}

The physical body forms the food sheath, the subtle body forms the next three - the Vital, the Mental and the Intellectual sheaths. The causal body is the Blissful sheath.

At death, the self leaves the physical body, but retains the subtle and casual bodies.\textsuperscript{17} When the soul has performed certain functions and has enjoyed certain pleasures, and has fulfilled certain desires, it finds that the gross body is no longer of any use, and it does not work right. Then the living soul leaves the physical body, and manufactures another. The impressions or ideas, which we have, together with the powers we have, remain with us in some form or other, in the subtle body. “According to those impressions of karma ... a very fine physical vesture for the subtle and casual body is formed, at the time of his departure from the gross body. This fine garb carries the potencies of the next gross body he assumes.”\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{17} Swami Satprakasananda, Op cit 13, p.211.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid
To believe in the transmigration of soul with Karmic residues means to believe in the principle of conservation of *saṃskāras*, i.e., *saṃskāras* do not perish before the realisation of their consequences and persist and exist at different times and to believe in transmigration of soul and karmic residues means to believe in the theory of *saṃskāra* or continued existence of the self with karmic residues in a succession of lives since the later is built in the beliefs of transmigration and karmic residues. This implies that birth is not the beginning of the existence of identity of the particular 'jiva' and death is not the cessation of its existential status. The identity of the phenomenon self persists through different life times. The existence of the 'jiva' is not terminated at the end of the death, but is transformed and continues to exists and it is reborn. The force which makes transmigration possible consist in the efficacious power of karma and *karma phala* and not anything else. This act force is a link that connects the past, present, and future lives of man. By the act force, we mean the casual efficacy of the act and this casual efficacy of the act consists in producing some result which lies in the act itself.

The belief in the Doctrine of Karma is senseless unless we believe in the transmigration of soul and ontology of karmic residues. Transmigration of soul and karmic residues constitute as a necessary corollary to the Doctrine of Karma. Rebirth is meaningless without karma and karma is not possible without birth. If we believe that the soul is repeatedly reborn in a body, we are bound to believe
that there is some link between the lives that proceeded and the life that follow. It is the karma, which makes transmigration possible. Transmigration of karma phala from one life to another life presupposes the ontological existence of karma phala and the ontological existence of karma phala cannot be conceived apart from and independent of karma and kartā in the sense that, without kartā no karma is possible and without karma no karma phala is conceivable.

Hindu scriptures have made references on the fantastic and mysterious journey of the soul, with the impressions and ideas, after leaving the physical body. In some of the Upaniṣads\textsuperscript{19} we have such a reference. When a bound soul is ready for rebirth, on the human plane, the impressions of his karma lead him to the parents from whom he can secure the materials for his gross body. The fine physical vesture that he wears, has the potency to acquire the essential material elements. Being associated with food, he enters the body of the male parent, suitable for his purpose. There he gets into the requisite sperm, which turn into a potent seed for his development as an individual. This is the seed that being united with the requisite ovum in the female parent turns into the zygote and becomes ready for germination. Though this mysterious journey of the soul is not fully acceptable to our reason and to modern science, yet the ancient seers,

particularly upanisadic people, have succeeded in formulating such a marvelous theory.

C. Kunjan Raja mentions the three views about the transmigration of the soul. Firstly, the religious view about the transmigration of the soul is that the soul occupies a body and when the body drops off, the soul may go to heaven, and after some halt there determined by the amount of good deeds he has done the soul returns to an earthly body. Secondly, the philosopher’s view is that the soul moves on from physical body to physical body without a brake and thirdly the scientist view is that there is a state of suspension between living a body and entering a new body, the soul has to wait until a body is ready. If the soul is to occupy a new body, when the old body drops off, there must be such a new body made ready and suitable for that soul to go into. It is not any body in to which any soul can get into. The succeeding body must be in accordance with the nature of deeds done by the person in the expiring life.

The fact that both karma and rebirth are in origin philosophical doctrines and not popular believes. People did not care much for them. To them the world was real and the present was the only chief factor in their lives. They never care for a cause to explain the present and never worried about the future. These were

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the problems that came with in the purview of the philosopher. The Theory actually originated as a philosopher’s explanation for the facts of the world.

It is said that this doctrine is the only one grand theory to explain man and his life and the external world and man’s relation to it. There is the Great Order found in the working of the world. Instead of postulating a God as a designer of the world and as the maker of the Law of Karma, the Law itself was identified with Order. If there is a God, man become subordinate to Him; if there is a Law, man becomes a part of that Law. India postulated the latter alternative and there is the great law of evolution in the shape of karma and reincarnation.

In general, the Indian philosophers are of the opinion that so long as the soul remains in a body, subject to the shackles of the organism in enmeshed in wretched matter, it can never be free from pain and suffering. They are unanimous in their views that man can not escape from this vicious circle and bondage of karma, so long as he does not seek shelter in his higher self. The ultimate end of man is to overcome ignorance and transcend the phenomenal existence together with its innate sufferings and sorrows. There is a possibility before man to transcend his bondage and attain absolute freedom, through a spiritual self realisation. Thus Dr. Radhakrishnan says, “Man can be led by the light of the true self or by the non-self and if he chooses to be led by the latter, he becomes subject to ignorance (avidya) and thus nurtures the sense of the ego
(ahamkara). This radical moral failure leads to the alienation of man from his true self and this alienation is a veritable hell".\(^\text{21}\)

It is a common misunderstanding that the Law of Karma militating against the doctrine of free will in man, without which man cannot be held responsible for his actions. Though he is guided by his impressions, he is ever free to transcend them and change the course of his life as far as his future is concerned. He is bound by the power of his past deeds, but he can break it through the power of his spirit. Of course, the psychophysical constitution and the circumstances created by his fruit bearing karma, can condition his freedom of action, but can’t annual it. He has the capacity to choose his present course of action, while reaping the fruits of past actions.

The Doctrine of Karma, with its necessary corollary, the Theory of Rebirth is an important contribution made by India to the world thought. A more or less advanced view about rebirth in the form of metempsychosis, resurrection and the like, can be found in other religions and in the philosophies of other countries. From very ancient times, the philosophers, sages, and prophets of different countries, have dealt with these concepts.

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When we try to find out the origin of the karma and rebirth in Indian thought, it is in the vedic concept of Rta, the rudiments of karma theory lies. The Doctrine of Rebirth is still at a distance in the vedic period. But an attempt in a vague manner is made towards rebirth in some Rig vedic poems. The principle of Rta is understood as responsible for the order and regularity of the universe. A more advanced view of Doctrine of Karma and Rebirth is found in the Upanishads. It is in the Chāndogya, Bṛhadāraṇyaka, and Kaṭha Upaniṣads, that this doctrine is mainly appeared. Here karma is the connecting link between desire and rebirth, that desire is the root cause of rebirth. In Bhagavat Gita, we have references of this doctrine. In Gita we find that karma is the cause of bondage and it is through karma, i.e., ‘nishkamakarma’, one can get liberation. The vedic, Upaniṣadic and the Gita’s views on karma and rebirth constitute the first chapter.

When coming to the classical orthodox and heterodox schools of thought, almost all, except the Cārvāka materialists, accept the Doctrine of Karma and Rebirth. The six orthodox systems accept the existence of soul. The concept of soul is a central point in which the Orthodox views on karma and rebirth lies. Regarding the different meanings of the word soul, used in the ordinary conversation and even in philosophical works, Max Muller mentions some of them. ‘Our soul may mean the living soul; it may mean the sentient soul; it may mean the soul as the seat of passions, whether good or bad; it may mean the soul
as the organ of thought and lastly the immortal element in man.\textsuperscript{22} Brahmashri Sitesh observes that the structure of the universe or the individual basically consists of two elements—subtle or gross; vital or material. The latter is subject to repeated changes and the former is eternal without any change in the original element basically, which is known as soul.\textsuperscript{23} In Bhagavat Gita the qualities of the soul are described\textsuperscript{24}, but did not point out what it is.

It is generally believed in Indian thought that karma alone is the cause of rebirth. Man is reborn for the fulfillment of karma. Good actions secure a higher and better position in the next birth, while the bad actions entail lower positions. It is also held that the human actions are held to generate force, which is the motive power behind the wheel of rebirth and death.

Among the orthodox systems, the \textit{Ny\-\text{\-}\text{\-}a - Vai\-\text{\-}\text{\-}\text{\-}\text{\-}\text{\-}\text{\-}\text{\-}\text{\-}\text{\-}\text{\-}\text{\-}k\-\text{\-}a} view is that, every action creates a potency for further action of its own. This potency is known as a blind force, there is a technical name for this. They call it \textit{Adrsta}. It is an unseen force that is generated by all actions and since it is unseen, therefore, the actions and their fruits—activities and their consequences—need to be guided. An intelligent being is required to determine that and arrangement for that and this function of the moral Governor is assigned in the \textit{Ny\-\text{\-}\text{\-}a - Vai\-\text{\-}\text{\-}\text{\-}\text{\-}\text{\-}\text{\-}\text{\-}\text{\-}\text{\-}\text{\-}\text{\-}\text{\-}\text{\-}k\-\text{\-}a} system to

\textsuperscript{22} Max Muller, \textit{Complete Works - Anthropological Religion}, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1977, p.188-89.
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Bhagavad Gita}.II. 20.
God. It is God who connects the good acts with reward and bad acts with punishments in the form of good or bad rebirth respectively.

The Sānkhyā believes that the birth of the body in the next form of life is an effect of actions done in the previous birth. They hold that every soul possess a subtle body which accompanies the soul through all its transmigration. As the subtle body moves the self in all its rebirths, it is natural that the effects of both virtues and vices of past lives should reside in it. It is in this way the past actions bring out their effects in the future life. Thus is the sānkhyā system, it is the subtle body, which is the result of the connection between puruṣa and prakṛti, the two categories, caused by ignorance, which in turn is formed by the impressions of karmas, for karmas took place only when prakṛti and puruṣa are united.

The perspective of Purva Mimamsa on karma and rebirth is unique in the sense that Purva Mimamsa is the only system of philosophy, which places karma in the central core of its thought. Its distinction of karma into nitya, naimittika, and of the kamya karmas and their connection with their respective fructification shows an interesting analysis. Their investigations into the details of various kinds of sacrificial activities and their performances lead to various kinds of heavens and into the injunctions and prohibitions of actions by the impersonal
authority of the Vedas, shows their views to be usefully practical by distinguishing each karma through its unique potency, *Apurva*, for fructifications.

The vedantic perspective upholds that there is ultimately one reality. Out of that one reality everything appears. Everything else is a manifestation of the same. Change is the manifestation of the same unchanging. They use the word *maya* for this. Due to this *maya*, the never changing appears to be changing. 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 what so ever.

All orthodox systems do believe in a permanent soul, hence their contribution to karma and rebirth is based on soul, which reaps the consequences of actions of past life or lives. The *Cārvāka* materialists have no specific theory on karma and rebirth. According to them perception is the only source of knowledge. In that sense, everything beyond the direct sense perception is not acceptable to *Cārvākas*. But the Buddhist formulated a definite and precise view on karma and rebirth, even without accepting a permanent soul. The Buddhist very systematically explains the doctrine within the framework of the theory of dependent origination. There are changes, the changes are continues, changes have a dependence one upon the other. Rebirth is an appearance of the
continuation with a particular form that has laid down. So it is in terms of law of karma that this continuity is explained by them.

For Jainism, karma does not mean merely a deed or work or a mystical invisible force. Here it stands for an exceptionally subtle form of matter that enables the influx at one. Invisibly it enters and modifies the jiva, which assimilates it. This materialists concept of karma plays a role of immense importance in Jaina thought. A beginningless association between karma and soul is the starting as well as the central point of Jaina philosophy.

More or less in the same manner the modern Indian thinkers interpret karma and rebirth. According to them, karma alone is the cause of repeated rebirths. The roots of their philosophical thinking lie in consideration that are existential. For ancient thinkers, the concept of karma, rebirth, immortality of soul, etc. are beyond the grasp of ordinary experience or of the intellect. Contrary to it, modern thinkers, keep on relating these notions to actual life and experience. Besides, their philosophy centered round man, assert that the capacities, the characters, the qualities of man have to be given fullest expression.

The Doctrine of Karma is an aspect of the Doctrine of evolution in modern times. According to Indian thought man brings about evolution in the world. There would have been no movement, no change and no evolution in the
world unless there had been man, at least man in a subtle form. Man has initiated this evolution, and man determines the nature, path and direction of this evolution. At a later time a distinction was drawn between a spirit and matter in a full-fledged manner. The spirit was pure, matter entangled the spirit. The spirit struggles to extricate himself from this entanglement. The matter is the seat and source of suffering of the spirit. Finally the spirit is released from the matter. Such a theory of transmigration and karma being aspects of spirit in the state of suffering, is a later feature.

Some of the eminent modern thinkers, who gave a definite theory on karma rebirth, are Swami Vivekananda, M.K. Gandhi, Aurobindo Ghosh, and Dr. S. Radhkrishana. Like the ancient thinkers, they also acknowledge the reality of suffering, but their approach to the problem is different. They consider life as meaningful. They go to the extent of saying that life gets dignity, nobility and human significance through pain and suffering. A detailed account of the views of Swami Vivekananda, the Neo-Vedantist, on the Doctrine of Karma and Rebirth constitute the third chapter. The theories of the other eminent modern thinkers on the doctrine are included in the fourth chapter.

As it is already mentioned, the Doctrine of Karma and Rebirth is the unique contribution made by India to the world thought. The influences of this doctrine on the Indian people are deep rooted in every sense. We have to point
out the relevance or significance of this doctrine on different spheres and at the same time it is a fact that this doctrine is subject to a lot of criticisms on different grounds. Both relevances and criticisms constitute the fifth chapter. And finally, some concluding remarks based on the findings of the research are included.