CHAPTER III
SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND HIS CONTRIBUTION ON
THE DOCTRINE OF KARMA AND REBIRTH

3.1 Introduction

Swami Vivekananda, the great spiritual giant, is one of the noblest figures that shape the modern Indian thought. Though the Modern thinkers generally base their ideas with the ancient philosophy and interpret them in their way, yet in their philosophies we can come across some refreshingly new ideas. In this sense their philosophy is known as both interpretative and creative.

Vivekananda's philosophy arises from the awareness of the social, religious and economic conditions of the Indian masses. He tried to solve the basic problems of philosophy in an idealistic manner. To him, the salvation of India lies in the return of Indian back to their own spirituality. He aimed at a spiritual awakening and accepted with gratitude, whatever he could learn from faith and description emphasising the ultimacy of spiritual values. He endeavoured to reformulate and reconstruct the cultural and spiritual values of Indian heritage in turn of needs and requirements of the present and future. His philosophy remained loyal to the great spiritual past of India, but at the same time, he kept open to the influence of Western science and progressive ideals.
Most of the philosophical ideas of Swami Vivekananda are derived from the Vedas, Upanisad, Bhagavat Gita and Vedanta. The rational and liberal outlook of Vedas, the Upanisadic concept of purity of human nature, the ideal of karma yoga of Gita and the Nomistic nature of the reality of Vedanta, made tremendous impact on him. He gave a new orientation for the philosophy of Vedanta. His particular approach to the philosophy of Vedanta enabled him to transform it in such a way that it could serve as the foundation of his teachings. In this attempt he gave attention to the philosophical heritage of Indian as a whole. He believed that Vedanta covers all philosophical trends. He equated Vedanta as identical with Hinduism itself.

He considered Vedanta to be the most suitable philosophy for modern man. Vedanta, according to him is not merely a theoretical study, but a practical discipline. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, “I will ask you to understand that Vedanta, though it is intensely practical, is always so in the sense of the ideal. It does not preach an impossible ideal, however high it be, and it is high enough for an ideal”. ¹

In a certain sense, he was influenced by Buddhism also. The idea of mass liberation that he emphasises has a striking resemblance with the Buddhistic ideal of Bodisatva. He was also influenced by Christianity from

which he took up the ideal of service and love. Under the influence of Brahmasamaj, his strong feeling against the orthodox Hindu superstition developed. Dayananda Saraswathy’s emphasis on indeterminate nature of reality and practical insistence of fearlessness had left a deep mark on Vivekananda. The study of western philosophy and science widened the horizon of Vivekananda’s rational and objective outlook.

But the profound influence in the light of which, every other influences were remodelled and reshaped, was that of his master, Swami Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. It is said that his master brought about a spiritual transformation in the personality and the mental make up of Vivekananda. As Swami Nikhilananda says, it was his master who had taught him the dignity of soul, the non-duality of God-head, the unity of existence, and one more great thing- that is the universality of harmony of all different religions.²

Ramakrishna was a man of powerful insight and a practical visualiser of the ultimate truth. He was a great scientist in the sphere of religion. Like a scientist he experimented the facts described in our scripture, and the facts of other religious. Dr. D.S. Sharma remarks, “in fact Sri Ramakrishna is a unique figure in the history of Hinduism, because without much education or

² Swami Nikhilananda, Vivekananda, A Biography, Ramakrishna Vivekananda Centre, New York, 1953, p.53.
scholarship, he traversed the entire region of religious experience by his own tapas and confirmed by his own personal testimony the truth of the Hindu scriptures. The first lesson which Vivekananda received from his master was to develop a spirituality in him. Ramakrishna taught him to be spiritual first and then stand as a rock to teach others also the experiences gained in life. The most remarkable feature of his Guru may be described in his own words thus, "I was so fortunate as to find one who was able to carry theory into practice. He has the most wonderful faculty of carrying everything into practice which he thought was right.

Sri Ramakrishna himself never gave us a systematic account of philosophical problems, though he is supposed to have had a vision of Truth. But Vivekananda tried to read into his sayings and utterances, a monistic philosophy which was in conformity with the advaita vedanta. In fact, the greatest contribution of Vivekananda to Indian philosophy lies in a new interpretation of the Advaita Vedanta. Whole of his life, he moved from place to place, holding aloft the banner of Advaita Vedanta, giving it a new shape and appealing both to the east and west. This new interpretation of Vedanta is known as Neo Vedantism.

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So far as his conception of Reality is concerned, Vivekananda is in perfect agreement with Sankara. For him, *Brahman*, the only all pervading Reality, is infinite. It is Existence, Infinite Consciousness and Infinite Bliss (*Sat-chit-Ananda*). “There is neither nature, nor God, nor the universe, only that one Infinite Existence, out of which, through name and form, all these are manufactured.” Such descriptions of *Brahman*, make us to believe that there is hardly any difference between the approaches of Sankaran and Vivekananda. But as a matter of fact, there are two aspects of Vivekanada’s philosophy - one negative, and the other positive. To describe Brhaman in negative terms is the traditional approach. Apart from this traditional approach, there is a clear and distinct positive aspect of his philosophy in which he emphatically asserts the reality of the world and individual. Negative, according to him, is simply the first step in the awakening of thought. Thereafter positive aspect naturally follows. “We have to go through the negation, and then the positive side will begin. We know to give up ignorance and all that is false, and then truth will begin to reveal itself to us. When we have grasped the truth, things which we gave up at first will take new shape and form, will appear to us in a new light, and become deified”.⁵

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Thus contrary to Sankara, Vivekananda believes that the world is also real, and not false or illusory. But his assertion regarding the reality of the world is not very solid, as he sometimes wavers between two conceptions. Brahman apparently manifested in the universe, and as really expressed it. He says,“ The Absolute has become the universe by coming through space, time and causation... Time, space, causation are like the glass through which the Absolute is seen, and when it is seen on the lower side, it appears as the universe.” In one place he contends that the Absolute has become the universe, but in another, it appears as the universe. This may be, due to his two fold loyalties - a strong intellectual attachment with Advaita Vedanta, and at the same time a deep sense of reverence for his master. Hence the metaphysics of Vivekanada is to some extent similar to that of Advaita Vedanta, so far as the negative description of reality is concerned, but it parts company and joins hands with his master’s position in holding the positive view that this world is a real manifestation of Brahman.

Like Sankara, Vivekananda also believes that maya is the power of the creator or God, but he thinks that it is the principle of change, a sakti that makes creation possible. Maya does not necessarily mean being illusory or unreal. For him maya is conceived just as a fact about the nature of the world, it seeks to

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express the essential characters of the world as it exists. He says "Maya is not a theory for the explanation of the world; it is simply a statement of facts as they exists, that the very basis of our being is contradiction, that everywhere we have to move through this tremendous contradiction that where ever there is good there must also be evil and where ever there is evil there must be some good, whatever there is life death must follow as its shadow, and every one who smiles will have to weep, and vice versa. Nor can this state of things be remedied". Here Maya is the term meant for the fact of contradiction that the universe so clearly exhibits.

In his philosophy, maya is neither good nor bad, but it is neutral in character. He places maya somewhere in between absolute being and non-being. He says "this Maya is every where. It is terrible. Yet we have to work through it". "The whole knowledge is a generalisation of this Maya, trying to know it as it appears to be. This is the work of Nama-Rupa, name and form. Every thing that has form, every thing that calls of an idea in your mind, is within Maya; for everything that is bound by the laws of time, space and causation is within Maya". At times Maya appears that one can known everything and at once he comes across a block, which he finds himself unable
to cross. Man’s activities appear to move in a circle and he finds himself unable to go beyond that circle. “With every breath, with every pulsation of the heart, with every one of our movements, we think we are free, and the very same moment we are shown that we are not. Bound slaves, nature’s bond-slaves in body, in mind, in all our thoughts, in all our feelings. And this is Maya”.

3.2 Man and His Status

For the modern Indian thinkers the root of philosophical thinking lies with the existence of individual living in the midst of his life situation. They give to life a meaning and purpose and makes it an aspect of the process of spiritual growth. That is why they accept the reality of the world and also the bodily aspect of man. The aim of life doesn’t lie in an escape from the world as it is full of sufferings and pains, but an active participation in the divine purpose. The world is considered as the only field for action and the body is the temple of ‘Divine’ and also asserts the dignity of humanness. Their thinking centres round man, and states that the capacities, the characters, the qualities of man have to be given fullest expression.

Vivekanadas’s attitude to the problem of the conception of man may well be characterised as one of the greatest humanistic approaches ever made

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11 Ibid., p.93.
by philosophers. Naturally one finds great stress on the potentialities and capacities of man as individuals in his writings. The humanism expounded by Vivekananda is intensely human and universal. But it is also something more than human, because it derives its strength and sanction from the ever present and inalienable divine spark in all men and women and this constitute its uniqueness. "In worshipping God, we have been always worshipping our own hidden self". Man’s strength and knowledge can be either destructive or constructive: they can give him and his fellow human beings life and love and a joy and piece, or death and hatred, sorrow and unfulfillment. A humanism that is strengthened and sustained by the ignition of the divine spark in man is far different from current humanism of the west, including its scientific humanism. There is a universality and dynamism and its energies are entirely positive and never negative. This is the strength and range and relevance of Vivekananda’s Vedantic Humanism.

He accepts the need for the manipulation of the socio-political conditions up to a point to ensure his growth and development. But he will insist that man must develop and grow further, that he must evolve and steadily unfold higher divine possibilities hidden within him. What is needed for the establishment of world peace and the functioning of a universal and dynamic

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humanism is the overcoming of the beastliness in man, through his education being carried beyond the intellectual to the spiritual dimensions of his being. This is true religion according to Vivekananda, which he defines as the manifestation of the divinity already in man. The Atman, the one divine and immortal self in all, is the only rationale sanction for all humanistic impulses and behaviour. In the words of Katha Upanisad which Vivekananda love most among the Upanisads, "This (infinite) Atman is present in every being, but lies hidden and (therefore) is not manifest, but It can be realised by the subtle and the penetrating reason of those who are trained to perceive subtler and subtler truths."13 When a man manifests the Atman in his life and behaviour even a little, he becomes fearless and at peace with himself and at peace with the world, because he then realises his spiritual oneness with all.

In the opening page of his work Raja-Yoga, Vivekananda has given a condensed presentation of this vedantic truth in four propositions.

Each soul is potentially divine.

The goal is to manifest this Divinity with in by controlling nature, external and internal

Do this either by work or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy - by one, or more or all of these - and be free.

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13 Katha Upanisad., 1. iii. 12.
This is the whole of Religion. Doctrines or dogmas or rituals, or books, or temples or forms, are but secondary details.

According to Vivekananda nothing can imagine the glory of the self that appears as man. Each man is divine in himself. “Man is divine, that all this which we see around us is the outcome of that consciousness of that divine. Everything that is strong, and good, and powerful in human nature is the outcome of that divinity and though potential in many, there is no difference between man and man essentially, all being alike divine”.14 He further stresses this point when says thus “When you help a poor man, do not feel the least pride. That is worship for you, and not the cause of pride. Is not the whole universe you? Where is there any one that is not you? You are the soul of this universe. You are the sun, moon, and a stars, it is you that are shining everywhere. The whole universe is you.15

Every human individual, according to Vivekananda, is analysable into three constituents, the body, the internal organ or the mind and Atman or self. Man is not an illusory being, but a real one with three constituents such as body, mind and soul. The body and mind are only temporary phases constituting the apparent man, but the real man is the self or Atman. Thus

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Swamiji makes a distinction between the apparent man and real man.

Thus the apparent man means the superstructure of the body, mind organism and the real man is equivalent to the self or the Atman. In his own words, "The Real Man, therefore, is one and infinite, the omnipresent spirit. And the apparent man is only a limitation of that Real Man. In that sense the mythologies are true that the apparent man, however great he may be, is only a dim reflection of the Real man who is beyond. The Real man, the spirit, being beyond cause and effect, not bound by time and space, must, therefore, be free. He was never bound, and could not be bound. The apparent man, the reflection, is limited by time, space and causation, and is, therefore, bound."  

As a matter of fact, it is the apparent man who is at present known as 'man' and this is due to our ignorance. The status of man is, that of the real man, who for the time being, been overshadowed by the apparent man. However the apparent diversity in no way affects the true nature of man. As he writes "No books, no scriptures, no science can ever imagine the glory of the self that appears as man, the most glorious God that ever was, the only God that ever existed, exists, or ever will exist."

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16 Ibid., p.78.
17 Ibid., Vol.II., p.250
Like a true Vedantist, Vivekananda never hesitates in identifying the true nature of Atman with Brahman itself. Reasons for identifying the two are generally similar to that of Vedanta. Souls can be conceived as expressions or manifestations of the Absolute, because even in that case they would become separate realities over and above the Brahman. There is only one way of conceiving the relation between the two, that the two are basically identical, and that their difference is only apparent. The apparent diversity in no way affects the true nature of man. The self or soul is one all-comprehending existence and it only appears as manifold. Hence the story of life is the story of finding out the real man or self through repeated births and deaths of apparent man.

3.3 Karma and Rebirth

Vivekananda accepts the conception of Law of Karma, which has been followed by rebirth. He holds that the cause of all diversities and inequalities, which we see in our world is due to our karma. He observes that the supporters of the theory of heredity transmission do not furnish a satisfactory solution to the cause of this diversities. Why is it that children of the same parents show a marked dissimilarity to their parents and to each other? According to him “such a gigantic will as that of a Buddha or a Jesus could not be obtained in one life, for we know who their fathers were. It is not ... If it was only a case of
hereditary transmission, how do you account for this petty prince who was not, perhaps, beyond by his own servants, producing this son, whom half a world worship? How do you explain the gulf between the carpenter and his son, who 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 on society in a Buddha 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.⁴⁸

Vivekananda observes that there is an order and uniformity in the nature and this conformity is closely related with the idea of nature, because, without it natural phenomenon cannot be explained. We can also apply this uniformity to the internal phenomena, that is, of life and mind. There is a definite method according to which man behaves in his life. Just as the external phenomena is bound by law, internal phenomena that of the life and mind of man is also bound by law. This law is the law of karma. Every action, whether a word, a deed, or a thought, must have its consequences in the present life or near future. The present life is the result of past live, future is the outcome of the

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present. As he writes, "Some karma we have worked out already, some we are working out now in the present, and some one waiting to bear fruit in the future. The first kind is past and gone. The second we will have to work out, and it is only that which is waiting to bear fruit in the future that we can conquer and control, towards which end all our forces should be directed". 19

Our action produces tendencies in accordance with which our future lives are determined by actions. Our present life is insufficient to contribute to such a tendency. Therefore we have to seek for their genesis in the past. 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 follow that their causes were conscious efforts in the past. Vivekananda writes "We gain all knowledge through experience, that is the only way. What we call experiences are on the plane of consciousness. For illustration: A man plays a tune on a Piano, he places each figure on each key consciously. He repeats this process till the movement of the figures becomes a habit. He then plays a tune with out having to pay special attention to each particular key. Similarly, we find in regard to ourselves, that our tendencies are the result of past conscious actions. A child is born with certain tendencies. Whence do they come? No child is born with a tabula rasa with a clean, blank

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19 Ibid. p. 247.
Each child comes with a hundred tendency generated by past conscious actions. It did not acquire these in this life, and we are bound to admit that it must have had them in past lives.20

He points out that every thing that happens must have a why, i.e., it must have been produced by something else which acted as the cause. Our future condition is determined by present condition. The linked series of causes and effects are never broken till emancipation. Actions are nothing but effects flowing from preceding causes, and each effect in its turn becomes a cause of a subsequent effect. This principle of cause and effect lies in the very root of action. That is why the Law of Karma is organic to man's nature.

According to him every work that we do, every movement of the body, every thought we think, leaves an impression on the mind and even when such impressions are not obvious in the surface, they are sufficiently strong to work beneath the surface, subconsciously. What we are in every moment is determined by the sum total of these impressions in the mind. For him, "Each work we do, each thought we think, produces an impression called in Sanskrit samskara upon the mind and the sum total of these impressions becomes the tremendous force which is called 'character'. The character of a man is what he

20 ibid., pp. 320-321.
has created for himself; it is the result of the mental and physical actions that he has done in his life. The sum total of the *samskara* is the force which gives a man the next direction after death”.  

He further writes, “The roots, the causes, the *samskaras* being there, they manifest and form the effects. The cause dying down becomes the effect; the effect getting subtle becomes the cause of the next effect. A tree bears a seed, which becomes the cause of another tree, and so on. All our works now are the effects of past *samskaras*; again, these works becoming *samskaras* will be the cause of future actions, thus we go on. So this aphorism says that the cause being there, the fruit must come, in the form of species of beings.”

It is believed that it is due to our karmas in the past, result in present life conditions including his body, mode of life, length of life etc. None else is responsible for our happiness or miseries. “Your own karma has manufactured for you this body, and no body did it for you. ... and the responsibility is on your self. You have not to think that you were brought into the world without your choice and left in this most horrible place, but to know that you have yourself manufactured your body bit by bit, just as you are doing this very moment.”

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Every action or thought has its effect in our mind. At death, the soul leaves the gross body, clothed with the effects or impressions that were in the mind of a dying man, the soul passes out and the destiny of the soul is determined by the resultant of the impression. This fact in his own words, "Everything that we have thought, every action that we have done, is lodged in the mind, it is all there in fine form, and when a man dies, the sum total of these impressions is in the mind, which again works upon a little fine material as a medium. The soul, clothed, as it were, with these impressions and the fine body, passes out, and the destiny of the soul is guided by the resultant of all the different forces represented by the different impressions."\(^{24}\) We know that we have a present and feel sure of a future. But how can we have a present without past?

The earth is called the *karma bhumi*, the sphere of karma, here alone, he can make his own future by performing good or bad actions. Even the man who does good karmas also has to exhaust evil karmas of his past lives. He writes: "This earth is called the *Karma Bhumi*, the sphere of karma. Here alone man makes his good or bad karma. When a man wants to go to heaven and does good works, for that purpose, he becomes as good and does not as such store up any bad karma. He just enjoys the effects of the good work, he did on

earth; and when this good karma is exhausted, there comes upon him the resultant force of all the evil karma he had previously stored up in life, and that brings him down again to this earth. 

Law of Karma is the elementary basis of the theory of rebirth. One can’t be imagined even without the other. This theory envisages that all sentient creation is endowed with a soul or atman, and this entity transmigrates at the death of a creature to a new birth, and the transmigration is regulated by the accumulated karma which have yet to mature and fructify. In this sense, we are all, the result of reincarnation through karmas. One who accepts the doctrine of rebirth must necessarily believe in the law of karma, since one is complementary to each other.

Vivekananda believes that reincarnation is the only theory which can reasonably account for the inequalities in every field. He cites an illustration of wide divergents between men and men in their powers to acquire knowledge. According to him, "No other theory except that of reincarnation accounts for the wide divergence that we find between man and man in their powers to acquire knowledge. First, let us consider the process by means of which knowledge is acquired. Suppose I go into the street and see a dog. How do I know it is a dog? I refer it to my mind, and in my mind are groups of all my past experiences,

\[25\text{ Ibid., p.270}\]
arranged and pigeon - hold, as it were. As soon as a new impression comes, I take it up and refer it to some of the old pigeon - holes and as soon as I find a group of the same impressions already existing I place it in that group, and I am satisfied. I know it is a dog, because it is coincides with the impression already there. When I do not find the cognates of this new experiences inside I become dissatisfied".26

Reincarnation depends on karma. Every action must be followed sooner or later by an effect. No action escapes without making its result. Every action has its consequences in the outer world and inner world of man. In outer world it reacts with the things and objects in that world and internally, it produces certain impressions on the mind of the doer, which is stored up in the soul. When the appropriate time comes, it becomes ready for frutification. In his own words, “Action can never die without producing actions. Now, if our acts can only produce their appropriate effects on this plane of existence, it follows that we must all come back to round out of the circle of causes and effects. This is the doctrine of reincarnation”27.

He says that, each thought that we think, every deed that we do, after a certain time becomes fine, goes into seed form so to speak, and lives in the fine

body in a potential form, and after a time, it emerges again and bears its results. These results condition the life of man. Thus he moulds his own life. Man is not bound by any other laws, except those which he makes for himself.

We see that the power of acquiring knowledge varies in each individual and this shows that each one of us has come with his own fund of knowledge. Knowledge can only be brought in one way, the way of experience. There is no other way to know, according to Swamiji. If we have not experienced it in this life, we must have experienced it in other lives. How is that the fear of death everywhere? A little chicken is just out of an egg and an eagle comes, and the chicken flies in fear to its mother. There is an old explanation and it is called instinct. What makes that little chicken just out of the egg afraid to die? How is it that as soon as duckling hatched by a hen comes near water, it jumps into it and swim? It never swam before nor saw anything swim.

What was first done with conscious will does not require the later on an effort of the will. Almost all the actions which are now instinctive can be brought under the control of the will. Each muscle of the body can be brought under control. What we call instinct is degeneration of voluntary action, for each involution presupposes an evolution, and each evolution an evolution. In this sense we see that instinct is evolved reason. The instincts in man or animals must, therefore, be involved degenerated voluntary actions and voluntary
actions are impossible without experience. Hence experience started that knowledge, and that knowledge is there. "The fear of death, the duckling taking to the water and all involuntary actions in the human being which have become instinctive, are the results of past experiences." 28

Human existence, according to Vivekanada is an outcome of repeated efforts of the self travelling from birth to death from the lower to higher levels of existence. Of course, he has not ruled out the possibility of a ‘fall’ from the higher status. Yet he does not seem to have any anticipation of it. The chain of rebirth is a means for the self to move towards its own goal towards freedom. The soul has got involved in nature and will have to continue its return journey until it reaches its original place, the state of freedom. In fact, it is the natural implication of the theory of karma that man’s future is determined by his own past actions, and at the same time, he asserts that the entire universe is moving towards perfection and freedom. Hence rebirth becomes inevitable for an individual. Thus what he emphasis is that the self is travelling from the lowest possible stratum of life through repeated births, and deaths, and it has reached the human level, which is the nearest approach to Brahma.

In short, the universe is a growing process, it is in an ascending order, an ascend towards Brahman, and the human soul has sojourned in the lower and higher form, migrating according to the impressions of past lives, reaching the highest form as man. This view has become more clear in the following words of Swamiji. “All this universe was in Brahman, and it was, as it were, projected out of Him, and has been moving on to go back to the source from which it was projected, like the electricity which comes out of the dynamo, completes the circuits, and return to it. The same is the case with the soul. Projected from Brahman, it passed through all sorts of vegetable, and animal forms, and at last it is in man, and man is the nearest approach to Brahman.”

He holds that our body is dying every minute and the mind is changing. The body and mind are the combinations of minute particles, which can never reach beyond the changes. According to him “Life and death are the obverse and reverse of the same coin. Life is another name for death, and death for life. One particular mode of manifestation is what we call life; another particular mode of manifestation of the same thing is what we call death. When the waves rises on the top, it is life; and when if falls into the hollow it is death ... what is this birth and death that we see around us? This belongs to the body only, because the soul is omnipresent”.

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always changing; and not the mind, which changes more rapidly than the body, which never has the same thoughts for even a few minutes. There must be an identity which does not change ... Behind the body, behind the mind, there must be some thing, viz., the soul which unifies the man. Mind is merely the fine instrument through which the soul— the master-acts on the body.'"31

Vivekananda points out that the soul, the real man, infinite, omnipresent spirit, is beyond any thought one without birth or death. The apparent man, the body-mind constituent, is limited by space, time and causation. Birth and death are applicable only to the apparent man, which has been under the iron grips of space and time. So long as he is ignorant of his real nature, he has to move under the cycle of birth and death. "Death overtakes everything which is complex. The soul is a single element, not composed anything else, and therefore it can't die. By its very nature, the soul must be immortal."32. "There is only one being, One Existence, the ever blessed, the omnipresent the omniscient, the birthless, the deathless"33.

Vivekananda was in every sense of the term, spiritual teacher of the world. All his activities in every part of the country and abroad have one

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32 Ibid., p. 236.
objective. This was to give to man the priceless gift of self knowledge, to make him realise the Atman, the Divine, that is within all. For, the soul or atman is regarded to be omnipresent and eternal reality. All the lives through which the soul passes are like different pages of a book. By learning one page, after another, the book is finished. When the book is finished there is no need of turning the pages. Similarly the soul passes through different lives till it becomes perfect. The stage of perfection is nothing but the realisation of the innate infinity. “The soul is without birth and without death; it is not a compound or combination but an independent individual, and as such it cannot be created or destroyed. It is only travelling through various states”.

This soul cannot exist in stillness consciously and passively. If it can exists in stillness it can be composed of particles, because particles are inherently mobile. It would automatically follow that nothing that is not composed of particles can be destroyed, can never be disintegrated. The soul is not composed of any materials, therefore it must be indestructible. For the same reason, it must also be without any beginning. So the soul is with out any beginning or end, since what has a beginning, must have an end.

According to Vivekanada, the soul is not eternally bound. It becomes subject to bondage due to ignorance. Man is the constituent of three elements,

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the body, mind and self. The body is the external coating of the soul, the mind is the internal coating of the soul, and the soul itself is the eternal, pure, perfect and all pervading reality. It acts through mind and body and enjoys the fruits of action. The action done by man produces an impression in the mind, and these impressions untidily form a force which is the character. This character is the effect of the physical and mental action done by the individual. After the death of the man, the elements which form the body dissolves into its component elements, but the impressions become a force and due to this force Atman is required to assume another body so long as our impressions are not exhausted. When these impressions are exhausted due to our own karmas, then the Atman becomes free and perfect. Here, Swami says thus: “When the whirl falls down, the Atman finds that It is all pervading. It can go where It likes, is entirely free, and is able to manufacture any number of minds or bodies It likes, but until then It can go only with the whirl. This freedom is the goal towards which we are all moving.”

“This pure and perfect being, the soul, is one wheel and this external hallucination of body and mind is the other wheel, joined together by the pole of work, of Karma.”

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For him, this self or soul is the illuminator, the real Ruler, Governor and perceiver and mind is the instrument through which it receives impression form sense organs. He explains, how, through sense organs, through mind, the self controls and perceives the things. "The self is the illuminator, and the mind is the instrument in Its hand, and through that instrument It gets hold of the external instrument and thus comes perception. The external instruments gets hold of the impressions and carry them to the organs, that the eyes, and ears are only receivers - it is the internal organs, the brain centres, which act. In Sanskrit these centres are called Indriyas. They carry the sensations to the mind, and the mind presents them back further back to another state of the mind which is called in Sanskrit as chitta, and there they are organized into will, and all these present them to the self of man. He then sees and gives His orders. Then the mind immediately acts on the organs, the organs on the external body. The real Perceiver, the real Ruler, the Governor, the Creator, the Manipulator of all this is the self of man."37

Though the Atman becomes subject to bondage due to its own karma, it ever seeks freedom because freedom is its own real nature. As the Atman is projected from Brahman, it tries to back to its original source. Projected from Brahman, it passed through all sorts of vegetables and animal forms, and at last

37 Ibid., p. 233.
it is in man, and man is the nearest approach to Brahman. All the struggles which we see in the universe represents various attempts made to go back to Brahman. The continuous chain of death and birth goes on till the soul realises its perfect nature. "A soul enters one form, resides in it for a time, then leaves it and goes into another, and quits that again for a third. Thus the round goes on till it comes out of the wheel and becomes free". For him, "The doctrine of reincarnation asserts the freedom of the soul ... if I set the wheel in motion, I am responsible for the result. And if I can bring misery, I can also stop it. It necessarily follows that we are free. There is no such thing as fate. There is nothing to compel us. what we have done, that we can undo".

We must be aware of the fact that the birth and death, that we see in our every day life is subjected to our physical body. It is our body which enjoys or suffers. As the soul is permanent and Infinite, there is no question of its decay. Since no decay of soul, there is no question of its birth and death. He writes: "There is but one soul in the universe, not two. It neither comes, nor goes. It is neither born, nor dies, nor reincarnates. How can it die? Where can it go? All these heavens, all these earths, and all these places are vain imagination of the mind."

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Vivekananda is convinced of the fact that consciously or unconsciously, all of us are marching towards the goal, the realisation of the self towards freedom i.e., immortality. For this the soul has to grow, to evolve. From the lowest protoplasm to the most perfect human being, there is but one life. We shall have to believe that it is the same basic being which expresses itself from beginning to the end. "This whole universe, therefore is the self trying to realise Itsself. This reflection is thrown back first from the protoplasm, then from plants and animals, and so on, and on from better and better reflectors, until the best reflector, the perfect man, is reached."\(^{41}\)

He is of the opinion that bondage is due to our ignorance of the real nature of the self that is we are the Infinite Reality, the Brahman. He believes that the soul, the Atman, which resides in the body-mind organism is Brahman itself. He equates Atman with Brahman. Here we find the revival of the old Upanishad equation of the soul with Brhaman. He writes thus, "The sat chit ananda - Existence - knowledge - Bliss Absolute - is the nature, the birth right of the soul, and all the manifestations that we see are Its expressions dimly or brightly manifesting Itself."\(^{42}\)

In our everyday life, we see that man is in constant search for God


outside himself. In churches, in temples, in every hill and dale he is wandering in search of God. Vivekanada points out that man does not realise the fact that his search for a God is in vain. At the end of this search, he certainly comes back to the point from which he started, that is his soul or Atman. In the words of Swamiji, "Man after his vain search after various gods outside himself, completes the circle, and comes back to the point, from which he started - the human soul, and he finds that the God whom he was searching in hell and dale, whom he was seeking in every brook, in every temples, in every churches, and heavens, that God whom he was even imagining as sitting in heaven and ruling the world is his own self. I am He and He is I. None but I was God." He further reaffirms that the soul in man is the same as the Infinite reality Brahman i.e. each man is Brahman itself. Here he emphasises thus: "I am existence - knowledge - Bliss Absolute. I am He, I am He."

According to Swamiji man cannot blame anybody for his own miseries or unhappiness. Our present life condition is the result of the self conscious efforts of the past. We have enough freedom to make fresh motives and also to choose among the alternatives. So we should take the whole responsibility of our present condition upon ourselves. Our miseries of pains were not created by anyone else. It is our own creations. We are the creator of our own destiny. In

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his own words, "Blame none for your own faults, stand upon your own feet, and take the whole responsibility upon yourselves. Say, 'this misery that I am suffering is of my own doing, and that very thing proves that it will have to be undone by me alone'. That which I created, I can demolish; that which is created by someone else I shall never be able to destroy. Therefore, stand-up, be bold and strong. Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders, and know that you are the creator of your own destiny. All the strength and succour you want is within yourself. Therefore, make your own future. 'Let the dead past bury its dead'. The infinite future is before you, and you must always remember that each word, the thought and the deed, lays up a store for you, and that as the bad thoughts and bad works are ready to spring upon you like tigers, so also there is inspiring hope that the good thoughts and good deeds are ready with the power of a hundred thousand angels to defend you always and for ever."

3.4 The Ways of Realisation of Immortality

The most pivotal concept in Hinduism is that relates to liberation or moksa. According to Swamiji, the ultimate destiny of an individual is the liberation, i.e., the realisation of immortality of the soul. It is only when man is able to pass beyond the cycle of births and rebirths, that he is able to attain this.

state. Births and deaths are guided by the karmas performed by the self, and again by actions, the activity of body producing karma can be stopped. Such a state would be a state in which suffering and the chain of death and rebirth come to an end.

Like an Advaitin, Vivekananda believes that the soul survives death, that this survival assumes firstly the form of rebirth and finally the realisation of immortality, of complete freedom. He views rebirth as an aspect of immortality, and ultimate realization of immortality would mean getting out not only of this world, but also of the cycle of births and rebirths. Here we can find the two aspects of immortality, survival and immortality as such. Survival means merely that the death is not the end of life. In this context, he takes help from the doctrine of ignorance and karma and incorporates them in his doctrine of the soul.

We find that the whole world is consciously or unconsciously trying to attain the realisation of immortality. According to him, this realisation can be achieved by *Karma, Bhakti, Jnana* and also through psychic control. They are not inconsistent with each other, but they are complementary to each other. This process of realisation is called Yoga, i.e., the union of the individual and the universal soul, i.e., God. Taking into consideration the four broad divisions of the human mind, he taught the Yoga of divine love (*Bhakti-Yoga*), the Yoga of
work [Karma-Yoga], the Yoga of philosophical knowledge [Jnana-Yoga], and the Raja-Yoga which involved in psychic and prana control. He is of the opinion that the idea of perfect man and the ideal of religion is to become harmoniously balanced in the four elements, which could by attained by Yoga or Union. In this own words “To the worker, it is union between men and the whole of humanity; to the mystic, between his lower and Higher self; to the lover, union between himself and the God of Love; and to the philosopher, it is the union of all existence. This is what is meant by Yoga”.

The man who seeks after this union is Yogi. Some people are to lift veil of ignorance through Jnana, they are followers of Jnan Yoga. Some try to attain their goal by doing work selflessly, are following karma yoga. Again some people try to establish communion with God through love are the followers of Bhakti Yoga and lastly there are men who try to realise God by their concentration is the method of Raja-Yoga. Indeed the credit for popularising the philosophy of Yoga goes to Swamiji. He picked up this philosophy from the old scriptures and explained it in a manner that attracted numerous persons in India and abroad.

\(^{46}\) Swami Vivekananda, Jnana Yoga, Advaita Ashram, Calcutta, 1993, pp.386-387.
a) Jnana-Yoga

Jnana-Yoga is the way for the realisation of the highest reality through knowledge, i.e., Brahman through knowledge. It is based on the realisation that bondage is due to ignorance and hence there is no liberation without knowledge of ultimate reality. Mere knowledge about the reality is not enough for the realisation of Brahman. Jnana-Yoga helps as to know that our real nature is nothing but the Infinite Reality or Brahman. The truth about the reality is first to be heard, then thought about, and then mediated upon it. These three steps are called Sravana, Manana and Nididhyasana. Only after continuous meditation, one is able to realise that Brahman is his own life. A Jnana-Yogi should firstly try to control his senses and body and also should try to get rid of all kinds of selfishness through controlling the body, the senses and even the mind. By controlling the body, the senses and the mind, one can concentrate on the Highest reality and through this concentration one can attain perfect peace. This way of attaining perfection is called Jnana-Yoga, for, in this Yoga, one attains perfection only through knowledge about ultimate reality.

This is the yoga which can be practised only by some persons who are more mentally and intellectually strong. A Jnana Yogi wants to see reality as it is, to realise it and to become one with it. A complete identity between Atman and Brahman is established by him in this way. Thus jnana yoga “tells man
that he is essentially divine. It shows to mankind the real unity of being, and that each one of us is the Lord God himself, manifested on earth. All of us, from the lowest worm that crawls under our feet to the highest beings to whom we took up with wonder and owe - all are manifestations of the same Lord.\textsuperscript{47}

\textit{b) Bhakti Yoga}

Bhakti Yoga is a genuine search after the Lord; a search beginning, continuing and ending in love. The central secret of Bhakti yoga is to control feelings and emotions and to give the soul higher and higher directions towards God. The union with God through intense love is the most convenient and easiest of all the other ways leading to spiritual goal. Vivekananda defines it as a method of "the realisation of the divinity through devotion to, and love of, a Personal God."\textsuperscript{48}

Bhakti yoga accepts the personal God as its main postulate, for, personal God fits into the very mental structure to the Bhakta, and this path is a path of love, but "this love cannot be reduced to any earthly benefit, because so long as worldly desires last that kind of love doesn't come."\textsuperscript{49} He believes that strong emotions have the capacity to awaken and activate the potential powers of man.

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Ordinary emotions can be transformed into powerful feelings. Ordinary love can be converted into Divine love or supreme devotion, that is Bhakti marga.

Love is a natural instinct of man and as such it does not require any strict and special training in man to realise God. According to him all kinds of worldly love are transitory and hence they cannot be termed as real love. A real love is selfless, unchanging, eternal, and the object of love must be infinite being, which is also unchangeable. God is the only object which is eternal, and unchanging. This love will be universal love, love for all, because, this will be based on the realisation of oneness of everything. In the words of Swamiji: “The love for our children and our wives is mere animal love; that love which is perfectly unselfish is the only love, and that is of God. It is very difficult thing to attain to”\(^{50}\).

Swamiji classified the steps through which the Bhakti yoga progresses towards the realisation of the supreme goal. The first step is the external worship. It is prescribed for the ordinary man because he cannot concentrate on the subtle expression of God. He begins his worship in a gross manner, the representation of God’s like idols and images are all objects of external worship. In the next step, prayer, and repetition of God’s name, chanting of religious hymns and singing songs of God’s glory, would become prominent. In

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the next stage, this kind of prayer is transcended, and in its place, a sort of a silent meditation starts. In this stage, there exists for the devotee nothing but God. In the final stage, even this distinction vanishes and the devotee becomes almost one with the supreme. It is a kind of inner realisation, and a feeling of oneness of everything. In Bhakti Yoga, we start as a dualist. God seems to be a separate being. Man begins to approach God through love and comes nearer and nearer to God until the two become one. In the words of Swamiji, “we all begin with love for ourselves and the unfair claims, of the little self make even love selfish. At last, however, comes the full blaze of light, in which this little self is seen to have become one with the Infinite. Man himself is transfigured in the presence of this Light of love, and he realised at last the beautiful and inspiring truth that Love, the Lover, and the Beloved are one”.  

c) *Karma Yoga*

Karma yoga is the attachment of God through work. It is a system of ethics and religion intended to attain freedom through unselfishness and by good works. In other words, it is the attachment of God through work. The Karma yoga preached by Swamiji is based on the teachings of *Bhagavat Gita*. It emphasises the nature of action and selflessness. Karma Yogi is one who given up one’s whole body, mind and everything as an eternal sacrifice to Lord

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and attain perfect peace. In his own words, "karma yoga, therefore, is a system of ethics and religious intended to attain freedom through unselfishness, and by good works. The karma yogi need not believe in any doctrine whatever. He may not believe even in God, may not ask what his soul is, nor think of any metaphysical speculation. He has got his own special aim of realising selfishness; and he has to work it out himself" 52.

While he takes up the main theme of the Gita, the philosophy of work without any attachment whatsoever his merit lies in the fact that he has simplified the yoga of the Gita to become popular. The secret of action is that one must not expect anything in return for the action performed. One must assume the permanent role of a giver, in which everything given as a free offering to the world. To work without any selfish motive is essential. According to him, "karma yoga is the attaining through unselfish work of that freedom which is the goal of all human nature. Every selfish action, therefore, retards our reaching the goal and every unselfish action takes us towards the goal; that is why the only definition that can be given of morality is this: That which is selfish is immoral, and that which is unselfish is moral." 53

53 Ibid., p.110.
Karma yoga is a “manner in which a man realises his own divinity through works and duty”\textsuperscript{54}. It teaches us how to work for work’s sake, unattached without caring who is helped, and what for. Karma Yogi works because it is his nature and he feels that it is good for human to do so, and he has no object beyond that. “Our duty to others means helping others, doing good to the world. Why should we do to the world? Apparently to help the world, but really to help ourselves, we should always try to help the world, that should be the highest motive in us”\textsuperscript{55}.

Vivekananda very reverently takes the examples of the life of Buddha, who after attaining Nirvana, kept on working throughout his life. His works can be taken as the ideal of non-attachment. According to him, Buddha is the real giant as a karma yogi. He did not lie away from the world. He remained in the midst of men, kept on working for the good of men and expected no reward. As he remarks: “He works best who works without any motive, neither for money, nor for fame, nor for anything else; and when a man can do that, he will be a Buddha, and out of him will come the power to work in such a manner as will transform the world. This man represents the very highest ideal of karma yoga”\textsuperscript{56}.

\textsuperscript{54} Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol. 5, p.292.
\textsuperscript{55} Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol. 1, p.75.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., pp. 117-118.
Thus karma yoga teaches us that man can attain his realisation by doing selfless activity in this world. A continuous doing of selfless work, or constant practices of non-attachment in all action of life enables man to rise above his self and to have a feeling of oneness with everything. Unattached action is evidently transcendence of the bondage of the self. In that homogeneity, we can attain the absolute bliss in this world.

**d) Raja Yoga**

Raja yoga is the way of the realisation of immortality by controlling the mind and body, by subjecting them to certain physical and mental disciplines. The yoga is called Raja Yoga, because it is believed that this yoga is the king of all yogas, i.e., something like the master yoga. As a science, Raja Yoga teaches us that of controlling one’s inner nature, one can control the whole external nature, i.e., he can control the whole course of nature- the external and internal by controlling his mind. Thus he remarks Raja Yoga as “the realisation of the divinity through the control of mind”. Vivekananda worked out the details of this yoga with the aphorisms of Patanjali for its basis.

Raja yoga is based on the pre-supposition that bondage is due to the distracting activities of body and mind with the control and analyses of mind.

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man comes face to face with the perfect power lying hidden in himself and finds his miseries, vanishing. When he finds that he is immortal and external, he goes beyond all wants and miseries. For attaining such knowledge, Raja yoga prescribes the discipline of concentration. He writes, “This, the power of concentration, is the only key to the treasure-house of knowledge. The system of Raja yoga deals almost exclusively with this. In the present state of our body we are so much distracted, and the mind is frittering away its energies upon a hundred sorts of things. As soon as I try to calm my thoughts and concentrate my mind upon any object of knowledge, thousands of undesired impulses rush into the brain, thousand of thoughts rush in to the mind and disturb it. How to check it and bring the mind under control is the whole subject of study in Raja Yoga.”58 This by right concentration the mind can know its own nature and operation.

Raja Yoga is divided into eight steps. The first step is yama-non killing, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-receiving of any gifts. Second in Niyama- cleanliness, contentment, austerity, study, and surrender to God. Next is Asana, or posture, is a series of physical and mental exercises. Pranayama or controlling the breathing is the fourth step, regulating the motive power of everything in the body. Pratyahara is next step, is the controlling of this mind.

58 Swami Vivekananda, Jnana Yoga, p.391.
and not allowing it to join itself to the physical centres. Then Dharana, the citta or mind stuff is confined and limited to a certain place. Dhyana or meditation is the highest stage which the mind can reach. It can go beyond the consciousness. When it goes beyond the consciousness, when it goes beyond the line of self consciousness, it is called Samadhi or super consciousness, where the barrier between jiva and Brahman is removed. In words of Swamiji, "The science of Raja-yoga proposes to put before humanity a practical and scientifically worked out method of reaching this truth." Thus, inshort, all the different stages in yoga are intended to bring in scientifically to the superconscious state, or samadhi.

From what has been said above, it is clear that the worship of God, unselfish work, worship of the holy ones, concentration and meditation are the various ways of breaking through the veil of maya. In order to do so, one must have a strong desire to be free. Attainment of immortality is the ultimate human destiny. It is only when man is able to pass beyond the cycle of births and rebirths, that he is able to attain the freedom i.e., immortality of the soul. Birth is the association of the soul with the body. This is bondage and causes suffering. This association of soul with body is due to ignorance of the real nature of man. The state of liberation would be a final transcendence of the

process of birth and hence a freedom from body bondage, and sufferings, and it is a realisation of the free character of the soul. He says that such a state would be a state of pure joy and bliss.

The state of liberation can be attained here and now. Swamiji lays great emphasis on the ideal Jivan Mukti. Jivan Mukta does not cease to be active. One difference with other beings is that, other beings act under compulsion, but a ‘free soul’ acts through freedom. The nature of Jvan Mukta in the words of Swamiji is thus, “He is Jivanmukta who can live in this world without being attached. He is like the lotus leaves in water, which one never wetted by the water. He is the highest of human beings, nay, the highest of all beings, for he has realised his identity with the Absolute, he has realised that he is one with God”60.

In brief, like classical Indian thinkers, Vivekananda also believes that the law of karma is the cause of the rebirths. The inequalities and disparities among the individuals are due to their karma. As the karma, so the rebirths. Man has enough freedom to make fresh motives. The ability of man lies in his right use of the freedom. For Vivekananda, the present condition of man is the result of the self conscious efforts of the past life. He asks, we are certain about the present and feel that we have a future, so how can we have a present

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without a past? It is impossible to think of a present without a past. The Doctrine of Karma and Rebirth plays an significant role in Vivekananda’s philosophy. In his spiritualistic, humanistic philosophy, man, his inner self atman, karmas of man, rebirth according to karmas, and the liberation of the soul and the like constitute a significant part.