CHAPTER-II

DOCTRINE OF KARMA IN INDIAN THOUGHT

The principle of Karma is deep-rooted in the Indian psyche since the ancient times. And almost all the Sanskrit texts have this principle as an undercurrent in them. The Samhitās, Brāhmaṇās, Upaniṣads and the philosophical schools both Āstika and Nāstika are not exceptions. The Purāṇās and the epics which belong to a later age also have the principle of Karma at their centre. The life and literature have certain close associations with the principle of Karma. The Bagavadgītā is one of the most important philosophic treatises which deals with rationally founded theory of Karma.

Karma-Meaning and Definition

Karma is the sum total of the works good, bad and mixed—which an individual perform during his life. It is the collective totality of man’s actions. It is these actions that determine his
future existence.\textsuperscript{1} Etymologically the word Karma is derived from the root Kr, to do, which also generates a multitude of other cognate words that are inextricably related to Karma-Kartha (doer), Karthavya (duty), Kāraṇa (cause), Karana (instrument) and so on.\textsuperscript{2} When explaining the philosophy of Karma, David Frawely observes, ‘as you sow, so shall you reap’.\textsuperscript{3} Many take it to mean that those who are rich and affluent in life must be reaping the rewards of past good actions while those who are poor and destitute are paying back for previous misdeeds.

Swami Abhedānanda states- Any action physical or mental, is called Karma and as every action is bound to produce its reaction or result, it is also Karma.\textsuperscript{4}

According to Sankaracharya, Karma is only a means to purify the mind and acquire jñāna. He also holds that mokṣa can be obtained by knowledge combined with the renunciation
of Karma.\textsuperscript{5} Vivekananda defines Karma very broadly to refer to any kind of action, mental or physical.\textsuperscript{6}

Annie Besant's opinion is that Karma is natural law in the full sense of the term; it is universal causation, the law of cause and effect. Karma is universal interrelation and is seen in any universe as the law of causation in consequence of the successive appearance of phenomena in the becoming or coming forth, of the universe.\textsuperscript{7}

According to Dr. Jagdish Chandra Jain, 'The doctrine of Karma is common to most of the philosophical systems of India. Every living being in this vast universe is guided by its own Karma or action. Every event of life of an individual occurs due to the Karmas accumulated in his previous birth. There is an endless cycle of transmigration which leads to continuous rebirth in various state of embodiment.'\textsuperscript{8}
KARMA IN INDIAN SCRIPTURES

The doctrine of Karma has existed in all philosophical literatures of India, viz; the Vedas, epics and Purāṇas. The various schools of Indian philosophy have discussed this doctrine in detail. So Karma has an important role in Indian systems of thought.

Karma in Vedic Literature

The concept of Karma, also found in primitive Indian beliefs, may be ultimately derived from Pre-Aryan, probably Austric sources. It was first expounded in the Śathapatha Brahmaṇa and now forms one of the basic constituents of the Hindu philosophical system. The Samhithās and Brāhmaṇās use the word Karman, which is the same as Karma. In the Samhithās and Brāhmaṇās Karman meant ‘any religious act or rite’ (as sacrifice, oblation etc.). Yuvaraj Krishnan says in his work ‘The Doctrine of Karma’ that the word Karman occurs
about forty times in the Rg veda\textsuperscript{10} and means only work or deed, especially sacrificial acts. In the Brāhmaṇas, the word Karman is used to mean meritorious sacrificial work or Yajña Karma- whereas the term used in the Samhithās for sacrificial works or yajñas is īṣtapūrta. The Vedic ritual of īṣtapūrta which in the Brāhmaṇas is called Yajña Karma, provided the roots from which the classical doctrine of Karma grew. According to Karma, one would, after death, enter the kingdom of light, bliss and delight or a world of darkness, dejection and sorrow. In the Brāhmaṇa works of the Vedas, mention is made of Swarga (Heaven) and the doctrine of Karma has a strong rational basis.\textsuperscript{11}

The Rg Veda described the theory of rita or truth. Rita is the controller and preserver of the world; Varuṇa is the Lord of the rita and he brings the pāpīs into the world of darkness and the Satkarmīs in to Swarga or Heaven.
Karma in Schools of Philosophy

Karma is an important principle in all Indian darśanās which are categorized as Āstika and Nāstika. It is only cārvāka darśana which is included in the Nāstika category that does not give importance to Karma.

The Nāstika darśanās such as Baudhā and Jaina can be seen vividly describing the concept of Karma. Even though the Cārvākadarśana recognises only perception as the means of knowledge, a description of the karmas for attaining pleasures on earth can be seen in it.\textsuperscript{12}

According to the doctrine of Buddhism the power that controls the universe is karma, literally action; consisting of kuśala and akuśala or merit and demerit.\textsuperscript{13} In Buddhism Karma is one of the five categories of causation, known collectively as niyamadhammas, the first being kamma and other four being utu, bija, citta and dhamma. Utu means
physical inorganic order. Eg: seasons and weather. Bija means physical organic order. Eg: heredity and seed. Kammaniyama is the order of act and result, Eg: desirable and undesirable acts produced corresponding good and bad results. Dhammaniyama is the order of the norms. Eg: law, in the sense of nature’s tendency to perfect. Cittaniyama is the order of the mind or psychic law. Eg: power of mind, process of consciousness. Thus with the description of Karma it explains four Āryasatyās in detail.\textsuperscript{14} With this Buddhadasa describes the Aṣṭāṅgamārga for the eradication of sorrow.\textsuperscript{15}

It can be seen that Jaina darśana is also Karma oriented. It believes that Karman is a form of matter and atomic in its nature. In the Jaina doctrine Karma is classified into eight fundamental types such as-


b. Darśanāvaraṇīya, those which acts as an obstruction to right faith.
c. Mohaniya, deluding Karma.
d. Vedaniya, feeling producing Karma.
e. Ayuhkarman, age determining Karma.
f. Nama Karman, physique making Karma.
g. Gotra Karman, status determining Karma.
h. Antaraya, power obscuring Karma.

According to Jaina school the worldly existence is dependent on these eight types of Karma. It believes in the life that is based on Karma. A detailed description of five Mahavrataas—Ahimsa, Satyam, Asteyam, Brahmacaryam and Aparigraham can be seen in Jainism. In Jaina thought Karma is a material entity, it is subtle; when a person acts there is inflow of Karmic matter in to the soul. Accumulated Karman in the soul forms Karnaja Sarira. It is this Sarira which transmigrates at death into a new birth. Thus, the Jaina darshana believes in and functions on the Karma principle.
It can be seen that in the ancient darśana of Samkhya of Kapila, Karmas are described through twenty five principles. Through the descriptions of Satva, Rajas and Tamas, their acts, the vikṛtis of prakṛti and the description of senses Samkhya becomes the darśana that gives prominence to Karma. The Yogadarśana of Patañjali evaluates Karma through the Astāṅgās- Yama, Niyama, Āsana, Prāṇāyāma, Pratyāhāra, Dhārāna, Dhyāna and Samādhi. By the description of cittavṛtis and their resistance, and samādhi, Yoga darśana becomes the philosophy that evaluates Karma.

The Nyāya vaiśeṣikās contributed the idea of adṛśta in the development of the doctrine of Karma. The Nyāya vaiśeṣikās also used the word Karma in a special sense that is motion; they used the term dharma and adharma in its place. Adṛśta is a blending of dharma and adharma. Therefore it functions as the cause of joys and sorrows. Also adṛśta is the cause of evaluation of the atoms. It is because of this that the Nyāya-
Vaiśeṣikās tried to see Karma as the action between birth and death.\textsuperscript{17} Adṛṣṭa is an instrument like prakṛti. It is assumed as an unintelligent entity. So adṛṣṭa alone cannot be lead one to Karma. But adṛṣṭa itself is Karmavipāka and Karmaphala. Nyāyavaiśeṣika explains that there is an agent that helps adṛṣṭa to reach the wholeness and it sees the God as this agent. According to Nyāya Vaiśeṣika this is how the creation is made possible. Thus Nyāya Vaiśeṣika becomes a theory and praxis of Karma darśana. Pūrvamīmāmsa of Jaimini categorises Karma as Nitya, Naimittika, Kamya and Niṣiddha. It tells that the fruit of Karma is apūrva. Besides, through the descriptions of different yāgās and upāsanās pūrvamīmāmsa remains as the darśana that narrates the concept of Karma in detail.

It can be seen that Uttaramīmāsa or the Vedanta darśana also describes karma. Brahmajijñāsa is the subject of study of Vedanta and karma is necessary to gain access to Brahmajijñāsa. According to Vedanta darśana,
Brahmavidyādhikāri (one who deserves to know *Brahmavidya*) is one who observes *Sādhanacatustaya*; and *Sādhanacatustaya* is nothing but karma. The concepts of karma and *punarjanma* can be seen constantly described in the foundational scriptures of Vedanta ie., the Brahmasūtra, the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavadgītā. According to Sankara, desire (kāma) is the cause of Karma\(^1\) and he said that liberation is eternal, whereas Karma is short-lived or liable to destruction.\(^2\) There are descriptions of good and bad deeds (punya/papa) in the Upaniṣads.\(^3\) Thus Uttaramīmāmsa describes karma and rebirth in detail.

**Description of Karma in the Purāṇās**

The doctrine of Karma and rebirth can be seen in the Purāṇās which are based on Pancalakṣanās and narrates their theory through stories. The important Purāṇās which describe the Karma theory are *Bhāgavata, Matsya, Garuda*, etc. *Matsya Purāṇa* says that human race, in its multiplicity, is born as the
result of the deeds of virtue they do.²¹ It has been described by Sankaracharya that it is a difficult thing to be born as a human being²² and for the devotional poet Pūntānam the human life is a blessing that one gets after several lives of hardship.²³ All these are a simpler version of Karma theory which is described in the Purāṇās. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa that narrates the story of the incarnation of Vishnu in ten skandhas tells that Karma is a generative force and ignorance is the point of origin of Karma. It is because of the same reason that Karma is the cause of all bonds and bondages.²⁴ In Vāyupurāṇa Karma is described as the root cause of the actions between all beings.²⁵ Here the word ‘beings’ includes not only the dynamic but also the static things in the world. The Vāyupurāṇa and the Matsyapurāṇa describe the rebirth, the concepts of the other world and reincarnation. The Vāyupurāṇa tells that even the people who reign the heaven may be degraded to human life as the result of their Karma.²⁶ Garudapurāṇa considers Karma as the root
cause of family life, having good family members and the joys and sorrows inside the family.²⁷ Brahmavaivartapurāṇa establishes Karma as the cause of the origin and termination of life.²⁸ Moreover Purāṇas consider Karma as the reason of Cāturvarṇya,²⁹ it may be for directing the society to virtuous deeds (satkarma) that the Purāṇas considered the theory of rebirth as a part of Karma. However, the idea that the good deeds will give good lives and bad deeds give bad lives has greatly influenced the Indian people. Besides, the Karma theory that is described in different Purāṇas looks alike. It can be seen that in the aspects like Karma, the life one gets as the result of Karma, one’s access to the other world, the concept of caste (varṇa) etc. the Purāṇas put forward a similar concept. The possible difference may be in the story or the mode of description.
**Karmacakra:**- The fivefold Karmacakra of the Supreme Deity consists of five kinds of merciful works towards the fellow souls called Panchakriyas. They are **Srṣṭi, Sthiti, Samhāra, Dhīrabhava and Anugraham**

**Srṣṭi:**- Evolving bodies for the soul to live and evolving senses for their use, enjoyment, punishment and purification.

**Sthiti:**- Maintain duty for the welfare of the souls.

**Samhāra:**- Destroying in due time whatever had been evolved for the welfare of the souls.

**Dhīrabhava:**- Dhīrabhavas keep veiled in darkness the things of joy and sorrow which have to be experienced by the soul, as a consequence of its works in previous lives, until the proper time comes for experiencing them face to face.

**Anugraham:**- Granting of blessing or the fruition of cherished wishes according to one’s desires. These are known as karmacakra of the Supreme Lord according to Hinduism.
Karma as an action

All actions are Karma. The consequences of an action are really not a separate thing. It is a part of the action and cannot be divided from it. Breathing, thinking, talking, seeing, hearing etc, are karmas. Thinking is mental activity. So the Karma is the sum total of our acts both in the present life and in the preceding birth.

Karma as an effect

All karmas have their own effect. If there is a cause, there will be an effect. Birth is a cause for death, which is an effect.

Karma and purification of mind

Karma is a means to the end till there is purification of mind. Still the embodied soul (a human being) cannot absolutely renounce all karma as long as the mortal coil is not shuffled off.30
Karma as the laws and duties

Sometimes Karma evolves laws and duties. Vijñāneswara, the commentator of Yajñāvalkya smṛti, classifies the moral duties into six\(^3\) they are-

1. Varṇa Dharma
2. Āśrama Dharma
3. Varṇāśarma Dharma
4. Guṇa Dharma
5. Nimitta Dharma

These Dharmas are also duties or Karma. There are four varṇas namely Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, vaiśya and südra. Viṣṇupurāṇa describes the following duties of Brāhmaṇas viz.

donation, sacrifice, study, offering, oblation to forefathers, preserving fire for daily scarifies, presiding over ceremonies etc.
The duties of kṣatriyās are the protection of the nation, protection of the life and property of all three varṇās, study of the Vedas, teaching, non acceptance, donation etc.

The duties of vaiśya are the cultivation of land, protection of animals, trade, study of the vedas, donation etc.

The duties of śūdrās are, service of the three varṇās, sacrifice without mantra etc. These varṇadharmas are duties or the laws of karma.\(^{32}\)

**Desire and Karma**

Man is threefold in his nature. He consists of iccha (desire), Jñāna (knowledge) and kriya (willing). These three fashion his Karma. He knows objects. He feels joy and sorrow. He will do this or not do that. Behind the action, there are desires and thought. A desire for an object arises in the mind. Desire produces karma, karma produces fruits, and man desires this fruits. So desire is the part of karma.
Karma and Rebirth

The doctrine of karma and rebirth is certainly an original contribution of India to the philosophical thought of the world. The law of karma is the application of the law of cause and effect in the mortal world. The theory of rebirth is the necessary counterpart of the law of karma and immortality of the soul.\textsuperscript{33} The Hindu law-givers accepted the doctrine of Karma and rebirth. Moreover the Vedas, Upaniṣads, Purāṇās and Darśanaś also describe the relation between karma and rebirth.

Guṇa and karma

The scriptures are classify Guṇa into three categories-Sātvika, Rājas and Tāmasa. Guṇa means quality. So the karma generates in accordance with Guṇa. Manu classifies the actions into three with reference to the effect they produce as satva (spiritual and religious acts), rajasa (good worldly acts) and Tamas (evil acts). The three states of existence are
determined by the quality of a person's karmas. Sātvika karmas lead to the birth as a Deva, rājasā karma lead to the birth as a human being, tāmasā karma lead to the birth as a beast.\textsuperscript{34} These karmas generally called as uttama, madhyama and Adhama. The Bagavadgītā and all schools like Samkhya, Yoga etc describe the relations of karma and guṇa in detail.

**Three kinds of karma**

Generally Karma is divided into three

a.) Sañchita karma

b.) Āgami karma

c.) Kriyamāṇa karma or prārabdha karma

The Sañchita karma is the vast store of accumulated deeds done in the past, the fruits of which have not yet been reaped. The Āgami karma is the action that will be performed by the individual in the future. The prārabdha karma is the action which has begun to fructify, the fruit of which is being reaped in this life. The prārabdha is a part of the sañchita
karma since this also is action done in the past. But the
difference between the two is that, where as the sañchita
karma is not yet operative, the prārabdha has already begun to
yield fruit. The fruit of all karmas must be reaped by the
individual himself. The character and circumstances of his life
being determine by his prārabdha karma. The prārabdha
karma cannot be avoided any way.\textsuperscript{35} The enjoyment of
pleasure and pain as a result of prārabdha karma comes into
operation in three ways. They are-

1. Anīcha prārabdha (enjoyed involuntarily)
2. Pareccha prārabdha (enjoyed through other's will)
3. Sveccha prārabdha (enjoyed through one's own will)

Anīcha prārabdha is that enjoyment of pleasure or pain
which comes to us accidentally and of its own accord without
any volition on our part.
Enjoyment and sufferings which we get through others are classified under pareccha prārabdha. Taking pains and bearing hardship in cross-cutting a righteous business, deriving profit from the incurring loss or losing the profit once gained constitute instance of sveccha prārabdha.\textsuperscript{36}

**Four Kinds of Karma or Karmacatuṣṭaya**

Karma can be classified into four according to its characteristics, as \textsuperscript{37}

a.) Nitya karma
b.) Naimittika karma
c.) Kāmya karma
d.) Niṣiddhakarma.

**Nitya karma**

Nitya karma is obligatory acts such as sleeping, walking, eating etc. that is, daily chores required for maintaining one's body.
Naimittika karma

Naimittakarma is a special occational acts, such as; vratas, upavāsās and performance of some rites on important days.

Kāmyakarma

It is the desire- impelled actions performed for worldly gains, like putrakāmeṣṭi, jyotiṣṭoma etc.

Niṣiddha karma

Niṣiddha karma is prohibited acts by śāstrās and society that run counter to the established norms. Immoral and ethical acts like stealing, killing, incest etc.

Sadananda the author of Vedantasāra describes six types of karma such as Nitya, Naimittika, Kāmya, Niṣiddha, Upāsana and Prayashchita. Nitya karmas or constant ceremonies are the daily prayers etc. those which, in their omission (under any circumstances), causes sin. Naimittika is occasional ceremonies such as the jāteṣṭi, contingent on some occasion, such as the
birth of a son etc. Kāmya means things desirable such as the jyotiṣṭoman sacrifice, of obtaining things desired such as heaven. Niṣiddhakarma are things forbidden such as the killing of a Brahmin. They are what lead to things undesired such as hell. Upāsana is devotion which consists of mental operations whose object is Brahmān with qualities. Prāyascitta is penances such as the cāndrāyaṇa. They are what cause merely the removal of sin.

Sakāma and Niṣkāma karma

There are two types of karma in Hindu philosophy; Sakāma karma and Niṣkāma karma:

Sakāma karma

Sakāma as the opposite of Niskāma karma. Some actions are done with a view to gaining or obtaining some results, that is sakāma karma. Sakāma karma binds a person with worldly affairs. Niskāma karma is the source of freedom from the same.
Niṣkāma karma

Desireless or motiveless action, done without any wish of result or fruit of that action is called Niṣkāma karma.

Thus the Karma theory exists in the Indian mind as a fragmented entity and it can be seen that the Bhagavadgītā internalises all these concepts and rationally evaluates Karma.
RESUME

Karma means work or activity. Etymologically the Karma is derived from the root Kṛ, to do, which also generates multitude of other cognate words that are inextricably related to Karma-Kartha-Karthavya-Kāraṇa-Karaṇa and so on. The doctrine of Karma has exist in Vedic literature, Upaniṣads and Orthodox and Heterodox philosophical schools. The Samhitās and Brahmanas are used the word ‘Karman’, it is same as Karma. ‘Karman’ means any religious act or rite. Ṛgveda used the word Karman and means only work or deed especially sacrificial acts. The Samhitās used the word Karma for sacrificial works or Yajñas. The Vedic rituals of āstapurtha which in the Brahmana is called Yajñakarma, provided the roots from which the classical doctrine of Karma grew. The Ṛg Veda describes the theory of ṛta. Ṛta is related to Karma doctrine. Like this the Vedic literature describes the doctrine of Karma.
Karma has an important place in all schools of Indian philosophy like Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaiśeṣika, Pūrvamīmāmsa, Vedanta, Buddhism and Jainism.

The Carvaka philosophy recognize only perception has the means of valid knowledge, a description of the Karma for attaining pleasures on earth can be seen in it.

In Buddhism Karma is one of the five categories of the causation, known collectively as Niyama dhammas, the first being kamma and other four beings Utu. Bija, Cita and Dhamma. They illustrate four noble truths in detail and describe eight steps for eradication of sorrow. In this way Buddhism proposes the doctrine of Karma. In Jainism the Karma is classified into eight fundamental types like jñānāvaraniya, darśanāvarṇiya etc. According to them our worldly existence is dependent on these eight types of Karma.
In Jaina philosophy Karma is a material entity, it is subtle, when a person acts, there is inflow of Karmic matter in to the soul and they describes five maha vratas like Ahimsa, Satytam, Asteyam, Aparigraham and Brahmacaryam.

The Samkhya of Kapila describes twenty five principles. Through the aspects like the description of Trigunnas and their acts, The description of senses Samkhya becomes gives prominence to Karma.

The Yoga darśana of Patañjali evaluates Karma through the Aṣṭāṅgayogas like Yama, Niyama, Asana, etc.

The Nyaya, Vaišeṣika contributed the idea of adṛṣṭa in the development of the doctrine of Karma. They also used the word Karma in a special sense that is motion; they used the word dharma and adharma in its place.
Pūrvamīmāmsa of Jaimini catagorises Karma as nitya, naimithika, kāmya and nishidha and tells that apurva is the fruit of Karma. They describe different Upasana, Yagas etc.

Uttaramīmāmsa also describes Karma. According to them adhikari is one who observes sādhanacatuṣṭaya and it is nothing but Karma. The concepts of Karma and rebirth can be seen constantly described in the foundational scriptures of Vedanta like The Upaniṣads, the Brahmaṇaṭra and the Bhagavadgītā.

The doctrine of Karma can be seen in purāṇas like Bhagavata, Matsya, Garuda etc. The purāṇas considered the theory of rebirth as a part of Karma. However the idea that the good deeds will good lives and bad deeds give lead to bad lives has greatly influenced the people of Indians. Besides, the Karma theory that described in different purāṇas looks alike.
Karma has different kinds such as, Karma as the law and duties, Karma as an action, desire and Karma, rebirth and Karma etc. Karma is divided into three Sañjita, Ágàmi and Kriyamaṇa. Some classifies Karma into four like nitya naimitika, kamya and niṣidha. Like this, almost all schools of the philosophy, the epic and Vedic literature describes the Karma doctrine as an under current in them so the life and literature have certain close association with the principle of Karma.
NOTES & REFERENCES


2. Dr. Urumi Samir shab, Thus spoke kṛṣṇa, Richard prakasan, Delhi, 1998, P-3.


5. Gītā Bhāṣya of Sankaracharya, Introduction.


8. K.L chanchreek and Dr. MaheshJain, Jaina philosophy, Shree publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2004, P-162


11. A kumar mazumdar, Early Hindu India, A Dynastic study, Vol- II, Cosmo Books, New Delhi, 1981, P-446

12. यावज्जीवेत सुखं जीवेत्। ऋणं कृत्या चूर्तं पितेत्।।


14. Sorrow, cause of sorrow, removal of sorrow, the way to removal of sorrow.
15. Right views, right mindedness, right speech, right action, right lively hood, right endeavor, right mindfulness and right concentration.

16. It is described in as uttarādhyayana sūtra, the Jīva sometimes born in devaloka sometimes in hell, sometimes it acquires the body of an asura, all this happens due to karmas, Uttarādhyayana sūtra, 3-34.

17. सर्वाणि पूर्वकर्माणि हन्यन्ते जन्मानि विभंजयति इति।।, NyāyaBhāṣya of vātsyāyana, 4-1-64

18. कर्महेतुकामस्यात्।। Sankara’s introduction to Taittirīya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya.


20. पुण्योत्पवेःपयोकर्मणाभवति पापः पापेरति।।, Brḥ Upaniṣad, 3-2-3.


22. जन्तृत्नानंतरजन्तसंवर्तम्।।, Vivekacūdāmaṇi.

23. Pūntānam, Jñānappāna.

25. Vāyupurāṇa, 31-42
27. Garudapurāṇa, 1-221-3.
29. It has been mentioned in Markandeya purāṇa that the division of caste as Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Südra, and their deeds are the result of previous Karma, X-21-26.
31. Yājñavalkya Śmrīti, Mitākṣara-1.
32. Viṣṇupurāṇa, 3.8-21-25.
34. Manusmṛti, XII-40.


38. Sadananda, Vedāntasāra-4.