

**SOME REFLECTIONS ON KALIDAS BHATTACHARYA'S
"THE INDIAN CONCEPT OF FREEDOM."**

The purpose of this paper is to take a critical and explanatory notice of the late Professor Kalidas Bhattacharya's views on 'The Indian Concept of Freedom.' This topic constituted a part of his Hirendranath Datta Memorial Lecture at the Jadavpur University published in the *Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture*, September, 1971. Now it is published in a book form by the Jadavpur University, Calcutta.

Dr. Bhattacharya's account opens with a classification of various types of freedom, such as freedom as Transcendence, Moral freedom, etc. In connection with the discussion on the concept of freedom as transcendence, he points out that: "... a real free agent who chooses not to submit to empirical pressure—whether it be from outside circumstances, or from another person or persons, or from the agent's own inclination and passions and bodily disturbances" (p. 351 of the Bulletin)*. This, he says, is freedom in negative sense. "Whenever man transcends Nature he is so far negatively free, and as and when he positively constructs something, by way of reorganization or not he is free positively." (*Ibid*, p. 351)

It is true that in the negative freedom there is freedom which can never be exercised, while, the positive freedom can be exercised. That is to say, in positive freedom we can do something or simply act. The action following from positive freedom for him, means 're-arranging things of Nature.' It is not

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mentioned whether positive freedom can be exercised in this transmigratory state or after transcending this state. In the case of the former, it is not possible by an ordinary human being living in the midst of the transmigratory state of this world (*Samsāradaśā*)¹.

That is why, the positive freedom is, I think, not a real freedom, but only apparent in the sense that each and every action done by an individual being in the transmigratory stage is predetermined by his merits and demerits of this life or of the previous life. So, it is better to call the positive freedom as a *pseudo-freedom*.

This point may be substantiated by another argument. When a man does something by way of reorganising Nature, he is not really free, since his inclinations are or may be due to his passions, desire etc. If it is said that an individual performs an action out of his emotion, the emotion will be the cause of his bondage leading to the non-attainment of freedom. But in the case of the latter one may exercise his own freedom as a *Jīvanmukta* which is elucidated in the concluding part of this paper.

But so far as the negative freedom is concerned, it is, I think, the real freedom which may, otherwise, be called Absolute Freedom. As an individual transcends Nature, he becomes free from any empirical pressure, agent's own inclination, passion etc

Further, Dr. Bhattacharya remarks that "A course of action cannot be judged right or good because it is freely accepted." (*Ibid*, p. 353).

This remark may thus be clarified. It has been stated earlier that no action is done freely since the agent acts always under empirical pressure etc. Now, let us reconsider the earlier thesis

and see whether there is any course of action which can be accepted freely or not. In favour of this view I am tempted to say that the indifferent actions can be described as free-actions. Such a type of action has been taken note of by the Grammarians as an '*Udāsīna Karma*'. Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣit has given a good example of *Udāsīna Karma*. It goes like this : *Grāmaṃ gacchanstr̥ṇaṃ spr̥śati* (while going towards village he treads on grass).² We may cite more examples : while going through the forest, he tears the leaves, or while talking he is putting a piece of grass in his mouth etc. These courses of actions are freely accepted as no desire or purpose is involved there. It should be borne in mind that as desire is involved in accepting and rejecting an action, it cannot be freely accepted or rejected. Other than these indifferent actions, no empirical act is, I think, free.

In the context of his discussion of Determinism and the concept of freedom Dr. Bhattacharya accepts the view that " All our activities and behaviours, whether in daily life or in rational enquiries, are based on assurance that all events are causally determined " (*Ibid* p. 354). But there may arise problem as to how this assurance is to prevail in future. So far as the present cases are concerned, this view may be taken for granted. But it cannot be foretold that this causal relation will hold good in future. In response to such a retort Dr. Bhattacharya says, " it is an assurance derived inductively from repeated observation that events have been so determined, supplemented by the absence of the knowledge of any event to the contrary " (*Ibid* p. 355). This argument is hardly adequate, as this line of thinking has been avowed by a section of Indian Philosophers such as the Older Naiyāyikas, Advaita Vedāntins etc., but not by the Cārvākas and Navya Naiyāyikas. The Cārvākas hold that the said causal relation can at best afford us probable (but no certain) knowledge of future.³ The 'repeated observation' is not considered an

absolute condition for determining the causal relation between two objects by the Navya Naiyāyikas. According to them, the causal relation may sometimes be ascertained by a single observation of the co-existence between two objects, supplemented by the absence of the knowledge of deviation ⁴ As for example "It has this colour, because it has this taste" (*Etadrū pavān etiādṛśāt*) and "It has sound, as it is ether." In these arguments the causal relations between 'This taste' and 'This Colour' and between being ether and sound have been ascertained from a single observation of their co-existence, which, of course, should be supplemented by the absence of the knowledge of deviation. Thus Dr. Bhattacharya's notion of causality is not propounded by all Indian philosophers.

While discussing the case of freedom through detachment and practice, Dr. Bhattacharya says: "Detachment is primarily my free refusal to submit to the causal determinants Detachment and practice are on the bridgeway between natural and overnatural—they are constituted of the *Sāttvika* elements of Nature which alone ... are capable of ... even successfully leading to the autonomy of the overnatural" (*Ibid*, p. 35)

The abovementioned view may thus be highlighted from the Advaita standpoint. No one can enter into the region of over-natural ignoring the nature or *Prakṛti* or *Māyā*, but one can enter into it after going through *Māyā* or *Prakṛti*. One cannot have any knowledge of the overnatural unless one goes through scriptures, Advaita texts etc. That is why, some of the Advaitins describe all scriptures, individual's reason, mind, sense organs as superimposed, illusory or *Māyā*, through which an individual can transcend this Nature and enter into the world of the overnatural.⁵

It has also been pointed out that our detachment or *Vairāgya* depends on the prominence of the *Sāttvika* element of nature. But how *Sāttvika* element becomes prominent or dominates over *Rājasika* and *Tāmasika* elements of Nature is left untreated and hence, there is a sort of vagueness in the argument. The following clarification may be given in order to remove it. The *Sāttvika* element of an individual becomes prominent as a result of having his devotion to God. It may be argued that it is not free from circularity. For, the devotion to God (i.e. an over-natural phenomenon) is the cause of the prominence of the *Sāttvika* element of Nature through which one can reach the world of over-natural. This is not true, for, devotion to God is not an over-natural phenomenon, but it comes under *Prakṛti* or *Māyā* as at this stage there is epistemological duality. But in the world of over-natural there is no duality, as one becomes identified with *Brahman*.

It has been stated that the practice of *Vairāgya* may begin with inspiring an individual 'to deal with Nature again — this time in a free attitude — for the welfare of others; and this welfare of others cannot be a consideration unless it starts with selflessness, unless, in other words, it is *Niṣkāma* from the beginning...' (*Ibid*, p. 358).

In connection with this point, I prefer to adopt an easier method for the welfare of others. As it is very difficult to start with selflessness or *Niṣkāmatā* it is, I think, better to advise an individual to start with his self and to extend the attitude to others. In this way he can cover *all* i. e. *God* as Bhattacharya points out. This extension of Self will serve the purpose of selflessness. In the root of self-extension or selflessness there is 'dedication to God,' God being only another name for all... (*Ibid*, p. 358). Though the extension of self serves the purpose of selflessness, its prescription has got a social value, as it helps

to give rise to the Upanisadic idea— 'Self in All' or 'All in Self,'⁶ which alone can bind *all* through the thread of brotherlihood and it will be a real social and spiritual welfare of others. It cannot be argued that to bind all through the thread of Self is the result of attachment. For, it becomes possible for a man as he is detached from the worldly affairs, which alone can afford him a real freedom. Moreover, the attachment towards the individual property or worldly affair is stated to be harmful for a man as it binds him, but attachment to *all* i. e. Self is not the cause of his bondage, but becomes the cause of Absolute Freedom. As 'all' has been included in one's Self, there is left out nothing that does not come under 'all' or *Self* or *Subject* and hence, there is nothing which, being an object, can bind him. So, an individual will attain Absolute Freedom (i. e. the real freedom), 'all' being the subject.

In the concluding part of the lecture Dr. Bhattacharya has contended that "(— the *Adṛṣṭas*—) have to be eliminated through *Bhoga* in succeeding cycles of life ... As for *Jāti*, it means the situation, the set up, in which *one* is born in the next life, and *Āyus* means the span of that life. Why the Indian Philosophers speak only of these three aspects I do not know" (*Ibid*, p 360).

We may try here to give a justification of speaking these three aspects from Indian standpoint in the following way. Dr. Bhattacharya has tried to show that many actions have been excluded from the purview of the concept of *Bhoga*, which means that the *Bhoga* of an individual is predetermined by his *Adṛṣṭas*. He may perform many actions which will not be treated as his *Bhoga* and the result of which will be considered as an additional experience not generated by the *Adṛṣṭas* of the previous life. If all actions are treated as *Bhoga* there will arise a defect called *Akṛtābhyāgama* (when a *Bhoga* is related to a person who is not entitled for this, for not having any merit or

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The distinction between negative and positive freedom is taken over, so far as I know, from Kant, and Dr. Bhattacharya seeks to apply this distinction to the Indian context. I have some doubts if this could be done in fairness to Indian systems, without ignoring their different motivations and presuppositions. To the best of my knowledge, I shall suggest that the *Hīnayāna* notion of *arhat*, i. e., one who eliminated all passions and suffering, is a sort of negative freedom, while the *Mahāyāna* ideal of *Bodhisattva* or of attaining complete Buddhahood and of non-egoistic striving for the salvation of all beings may be taken to illustrate the notion of positive freedom.

A man whose mind becomes purified through the performance of disinterested actions and who, after realising the whole universe as his own self, becomes self-restraint, can do work for the welfare of the world or propitiation of mankind (*Lokasaṅgraha*) and becomes unattached to it.⁷ Such types of action may be considered as the exertion of the freedom i.e. positive freedom. The *summum bonum* of life is not merely the attainment of spirituality and *mukti* for oneself, but service to all *Jīvas* so that they may also enjoy the bliss of Divine life. A free man (*Jīvanmukta*) in his *vyāvahārika* state, works for the welfare of others and his chief characteristic is *Jīvakāraṇya* and *lokasaṅgraha*, which are the positive gains of freedom. Other than these stages there are no other things where they can exert their positive freedom. This phenomenon has been accepted by some schools of Indian philosophy like Vedānta, Mahāyāna Buddhism etc., but not by all. So I have my doubts if the distinction could be made within the domain of other orthodox systems of Indian Philosophy.

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NOTES

- * Page numbers of the original paper of Prof. Bhattacharya are taken from the *Bulletin*
1. *Tarkasaṅgraha*, p. 27.
 2. Commentary on Pānini Sūtra—Tathā yuktāncānipsitaṁ 1. 4. 50.
 3. “Tadetanmanorājyavijñābhāṣaṁ . . . dhūmādirjñānānantaramagnyā — dijñāne pravṛttiḥ pratyakṣāmūlatayā bhrāntyā vā yujyate kvacit phalapratilaṁbhastu manimantrāuśadhivad yādṛcchikalḥ ” *Sarvadarśanaśaṅgrahaḥ*, Cārvākadarśana, p. 2-4.
 4. “Bhūyodarśanaṁ tu ma kāraṇaṁ Vyabhicārāsphuratau sakṛddarśane’pi kvacidvyāptigrahāt. ” *Siddhāntamuktāvalī* on Verse no. 137.
 5. “Tametamavidyākhyamātmānātmanoritarātarādhyāsaṁ puraskṛtya sarve pramāṇaprameyavyavahārā laukikāvaidikāśca pravṛttāḥ sarvāṇi śāstrāṇi vidhi-pratiṣedha mokṣaparāṇi . . . Sankara; *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*; *Adhyāsabhāṣya*, p. 50.
 6. Yastu sarvāni bhūtāni ātmanyevānupaśyati sarvabhūteṣu cātmānaṁ tato na vijugupsate. *Īsopaniṣad*, 6.
 7. Yogayukto viśuddhātmā vijitātmā jitendriyaḥ / Sarvabhūtātmabhūtātmā kurvannapi na lipyate ” *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, 5-9.

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