



Am I Free To Choose: A Perspective Of Daya Krishna

Banasri Kumar PhD research scholar Department of philosophy Gauhati University
Email:2016banasri@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Freedom is a very popular term that is related to many meanings. It is one thing which perhaps everybody wants and yet the very fact that everybody wants it makes it impossible that each one gets it to the extent he wants it. Daya Krishna (1924-2007) argues that the problem, at least at one level, is not so much of freedom as of freedoms. We have seen that one's freedom seems to be essentially limited by the others and thus, nobody can be free. The focal point of the present paper is to analyse and evaluate 'Are we free to choose?' Through this paper, an attempt has been made to analyse the perspective of Prof. Daya Krishna on the mentioned topic, namely, 'Are we free to make our own choices in life?'

KEYWORDS: Freedom, Choice, Free, Society, Daya Krishna

Introduction:

"A people free to choose will always choose peace"

Ronald Reagan

People always wanted to be free. But the question is what freedom is for every person? How do people imagine and understand it? Why is freedom so valuable? And do we really need freedom? Looking for the answers to all these questions is conditioned by what we understand by freedom, and freedom of what. For example, the freedom of choice, the freedom of the word, the freedom of action. It also raises other questions like what is freedom for us. It may be answered that freedom is the understanding that we can do some actions when we need. It is the opportunity of the choice. People should choose where they want to live or where they want to study. No one has the right to take their freedom. All people should have the right to say all that they think. Every thought, even if it is wrong, needs to get attention. Freedom then means that all people have the opportunities to make the choice and to be responsible for it. There is also the difference between internal freedom which is more important than physical freedom.

The focal point of the present paper is, 'Am I free to choose'? Through this paper, an attempt has been made to analyse the perspective of Prof. Daya Krishna on the mentioned topic; Are we free to make our own choices in life? For analysing and evaluating the topic

of discussion qualitative methods which are related to human feelings, emotions and behaviour are used. It focuses on human freedom and choices in life.

Freedom is a very popular term that is related to many meanings. It is one thing which perhaps everybody wants and yet the very fact that everybody wants it makes it impossible that each one gets it to the extent he wants it. Daya Krishna argues that the problem, at least at one level, is not so much of freedom as of freedoms.¹ One's freedom seems to be essentially limited by the others and thus, nobody can be free. The limitation on freedom arises, however, by the very fact of the multiplicity of persons in interaction. The only way in which it could possibly be avoided at this plane is by the postulation of either there being only one centre of freedom or of denying any interaction between them if there happens to be more than one such centre. If there is more than one such centre, the possibility of interaction between them can never be denied. There seems, thus, inevitability about the fact that the problem of freedom may only be resolved by giving up the dream of absolute freedom and accepting the limitation of one freedom by another. Hence, the freedom of each is limited by the freedom of everyone else, and in this lies the essence of the human situation.

Freedom and power have been supposed to be the specific characteristics of the Western man and his culture. The extroverted Faustian seeking of Western man can only be realized through the annihilation of the freedom of all others except oneself. And if it is accepted that freedom in its foundations is un-annihilable in a certain sense, then the Faustian seeking is intrinsically impossible of realization, for it is a contradiction-in-terms.²

But, it has rarely been noted that the Hindu quest is also for infinite freedom and power, though conceived in a different sense. Freedom itself, then, may be conceived in diverse and different ways. The difference in conceptions would affect the striving of individuals and societies to realize and actualize it in the way they have conceived it to be. The thinking about traditional freedom has a long tradition both in India and the West. But, in the West, somehow, freedom has always been thought of in relation to action, whether it be the action which is not done under constraint of anyone else or action which is in accordance with an external (law) or internal (moral) or action or internal-external norm. That is, freedom, in the West, seems to have been usually thought of and discussed in terms of action.

The famous dictum of Kant that nothing in the world can be called good without qualification except goodwill deserves, most probably from such considerations. The Stoics are the other great group in the Western tradition who has envisaged freedom in terms of willing rather than action. As Mortimer Adler writes-

"They indicate that such freedom is held, not in relation to the power of wills of other men, nor in relation to the impact of physical forces, but rather in the relation of a man's

own will or mind to forces within himself, over which he has the requisite power. Accordingly, it consists in being able to will as we ought, whether or not external circumstances permit us to do as we will.”³

As against this, the Indian conceives of freedom in a totally different way. Daya Krishna states for Indian Philosophy freedom has got nothing to do with action. For them, the state of freedom, rather a state of being or consciousness which, because it is free, is intrinsically joyous and blissful in its very nature. Suffering and bondage are closely related to each other.

The former, in fact, is a sign of the presence of the latter. Complete liberation or Moksha, therefore, is usually defined as that where even the possibility of suffering lapses or ceases. Ultimately for the Indian heritage, suffering which is a sign of bondage is due to something wrong within the self itself. It is not a restriction or limitation imposed from the outside, but rather something within the self, that is the cause of this bondage. The ‘outside’ in this case includes not merely others but one’s own body and mind as well. ‘Freedom’ therefore, is not the release of a capacity from the restrictions imposed on its exercise through which one achieves the ends, which one wants to achieve, and which one could not achieve because of those restrictions. Rather, it is a state of continuously enjoying consciousness which does not seek any end whatsoever and whose freedom is an immediately felt reality expressing itself in the twin facts of being calm and joyous, on the one hand, and of being essentially unaffected by anything else, on the other. The possibility of the other is itself the possibility of bondage and thus unless this possibility is eliminated, freedom, it has been felt, will always be precarious and open to subversion or destruction.

The history of the West, on the other hand, is essentially temporal and empirical in character. Men and groups are the embodiment of values and their social conflicts, the conflicts between values and ideas of different kinds, whether the vision be, Jewish, Christian, Hegelian or Marxian. The Indian tradition views it all as meaningless except as indicating some wrong knowledge, some ignorance of which it is an indication. Daya Krishna stated that he is ignoring the whole epic tradition of India in which it was the duty of a person to engage in the battle of righteousness and in which God has been conceived of as incarnating himself in response to this prayer of the people to rid the world of the reign of people who made it difficult to pursue the path of righteousness.⁴

Daya Krishna in his article, “An Attempted Analysis of the Concept of Freedom” reflecting upon the problems related to freedom, concludes that though it is difficult to determine whether the category of freedom is applicable to non-living things, unicellular organisms, and the insect world, it is certainly not applicable to the higher animal kingdom for the very ends of the animal’s activity is pre-determined and certainly in no case chosen by him. The concept of freedom is applicable only to the realm of actions of human beings, for human beings are the only beings who have self-consciousness. Daya Krishna’s reason

for affirming the freedom of human beings or persons due to the teleological character of their actions, and his reason for denying freedom to the animal kingdom is the compulsory pursuit of biologically predetermined ends.⁵

In Daya Krishna's words,

"The category of freedom is applicable to human beings alone in the sense in which it is rooted not in the bodily process of human beings but in the very essence of the human mode and practice of life, namely, that human beings are condemned to be free, they cannot be otherwise. The reason for this is twofold- one, a man is both a body and what Aristotle calls a soul or psyche- the inner life of moods, passions, feelings, emotions- has its own nature, follows its own rhythm, and is largely beyond human control. The moods and passions continually succeed and dissolve into one another and like bodily processes, are governed by physio-chemical laws. But, the human being is not merely a body endowed with a psyche; he is a being endowed with a mind, capable of subjective self-consciousness, and self-determination." ⁶

The capacity of self-determination or autonomy implies that an individual freely formulates his purposes, directs his activities, determines the use of his capacities, and forms his own thoughts, beliefs, reasons, and feelings. In other words, it means that a man's identity is self-defined in the sense that he freely decides how to structure his own way of life in harmony with his ideals and aspirations rather than conforming to other's expectations of him, or to the role they may have decided for him. That is, man's center of gravity or frame of reference lies within and not outside him. As a consequence of this autonomy or 'self-consciousness' or 'self-determination', man is able to create a gap between himself and the world, is able to distance or detach himself from the immediacy of the given, and to decide his response to it. And in choosing his response to the given, man has to make a free choice in the sense that in choosing one way or the other, or in not choosing one way or the other, or in not choosing at all he is not constrained by any factor whatsoever. The fact of subjective self-consciousness makes him aware of himself as an individual entity that is quite distinct from nature and other people. That means it makes the individual realize the particularity of him. The awareness of being an individual entity different from all other entities combined with the awareness of death, sickness, aging, etc., gives him a feeling of insignificance and smallness in comparison with the universe, and all others who are not 'he'. This gives him a feeling of aloneness and isolation.

Now, in order to overcome the feeling of loneliness and isolation, from the world or the universe, he has to choose one value over the other. The freedom to make a choice is both an experience of man's dignity and a moral necessity inherent in the human condition- what Berlin calls, "Fundamental human need". And this fundamental human 'need' is due to (man's) own active character or practical nature. The second reason for ascribing freedom to man alone is phylogenetic. Phylogenetically, the history of man is

characterized as a process of growing individuation and growing freedom. The lower an animal is in the scale of evolution, the greater is its adaptation to nature, and most of its activities are controlled by instinctive and reflex action mechanisms. The third reason for ascribing freedom to man alone lies in his uniqueness in being capable of 'being free with others,' i.e. he alone is capable of cooperating with them, participating in the conduct of their common affairs, and arriving at, and abiding by, collective decisions. No other being in the universe is capable of all these activities.⁷

So, finally, it can be noted that man alone can be said to be free for the reason towards which Daya Krishna draws our attention in another context, namely; that man is the only being who chooses not to be. Therein, lies his greatest freedom- the freedom from ends, from life, from conscious Being. He is the only animal who can commit suicide, a self-conscious annihilation of itself.

Daya Krishna makes a distinction between the epistemological and metaphysical aspects of freedom. The former he calls, "Feeling of freedom and the Other freedom". The feeling of freedom in man, according to him, depends on the successful satisfaction of the socially induced needs (the need for love, domination, prestige, power, social approval, etc.) which is not satisfied, would result in a feeling of intense frustration and unfreedom. One of the main characteristics of the feeling of freedom on which Daya Krishna lays emphasis again and again is the successful accomplishment of ends. According to him, man feels free when successfully pursues (the goals of eating, excreting, loving, responding, etc. in a particular way) and unfree when he fails to achieve them.

However, these are not acceptable arguments, either with the reasons given, or the conclusion arrived at by Daya Krishna. There are some uniquely human capacities, namely; rational understanding, moral judgment and action, aesthetic experience, materially productive labor, cooperation, wonder and curiosity, cheating, exploiting and manipulation of fellow men, etc. If man, as Daya Krishna thinks, in the ages when there were no motor cars, radios, televisions, printing presses, and a thousand other amenities of modern life, had felt not less free than us, he would not have felt the need for inventing all these gadgets. Necessity indeed is the mother of invention. In fact, we do feel, contrary to Daya Krishna's belief, that people in the past were less free than us, and that people in the future will be freer than us. Each invention that man makes is a step towards liberation from the forces that bind him in that particular context. Natural scientists' aim is to bring freedom from the past to the present generation that would have to be real, as real as the world. Whereas the natural scientist's aim is to bring freedom to men from the limitations that nature imposes on them, a social scientist's aims, through a study of human society and his imagination, to establish a social system where men would be free from social exploitation. Each of these is possible only if men do not limit themselves to the 'Specious Present' or past but project themselves into the future taking into account not only the narrow confines of what is given but also the wide horizon of the future.

In fact, Daya Krishna's idea that 'Feeling of freedom' is dependent upon the success or failure of the solution of the problem and not on the choice of 'ends', puts the cart before the horse. Man distinguishes himself from the plant and animal world in having the unique and most important capacity to choose one's purposes from many and to undertake a set of activities from among the many that are available or even to invent new ones. Man has in him both the capacity for choice and the capacity to will. Man can have the feeling of freedom if and only if his activity is directed by his own design and not undertaken at the dictates of another. The success or failure in the actual solution or the actual results has nothing to do with the feeling of freedom; success may at the most give a sense of euphoria and failure lead to frustration and depression.

Daya Krishna states also that if we have chosen to accept the ends and the method of their achievement then we would necessarily have a feeling of freedom lies in making a choice. Not to choose is also a choice. Daya Krishna, at last, said that it is the conscious transcendence that gives us (the) feeling of freedom. Finally, according to Daya Krishna, the reason why most of us always have the feeling of freedom is that 'the self-conscious choice' is always made within a perspective and as the perspective forming the framework is generally accepted all persons feels free most of the time.

Conclusion:

If Daya Krishna is right, then men could never transcend their given framework. In fact, a genius by definition is one who transcends the given framework. Copernicus, Freud, Wittgenstein, Mahatma Gandhi, Marx, Kropotkin, and Raja Ram Mohan Roy are but a few of those who have brought about a significant change in the theories of understanding nature and the world, by propounding theories and methods which were radically different from the perspective forming a framework and the socio-cultural pattern prevalent in their times. The feeling of freedom that each one of us experiences most of the time is not because of the general acceptance of the perspective forming framework, as Daya Krishna thinks, but because it is natural for us to have this feeling since our faces are set towards results and not towards causes, and the cause of present action always eludes us.

Naturalists like Hume, Mill, and Russell believe 'freedom' can be defined as the absence of constraint; Descartes and Kant defined it as the ability to initiate some thought or action, behavioural or internal; Leibniz conceives of 'freedom' as the inexplicable spontaneity of body and mind; Spinoza, Marx, and Einstein define it as the recognition of an all-pervading nomic necessity.

Hence, any analysis of the concept of freedom should explicitly or implicitly contain or at least give a definition of freedom. The definition of freedom should ideally be such that it can accommodate both the negative; i.e. 'freedom from,' and the positive, i.e. 'freedom to' aspects of freedom, apart from saying like Daya Krishna that consciousness is the focal region in which the problem of freedom arises and to which it is applied. Freedom does

not lie in the acceptance or rejection of this or that, but in the very fact of self-conscious choice of either and that freedom is only within a framework- a framework that is mostly accepted by the individual even though in itself it may be no more necessary than anything (about the nature of freedom, neither gives any definition of freedom, nor the aspects of human life to which the concept of 'freedom' is applicable). In the absence of such a positive conception, one could easily say that Daya Krishna accounts for the transcendence of the framework. On his view, revolutions then would become impossibility. However, the very fact that the history of mankind is full of revolutions/revolutionary ideas proves that Daya Krishna cannot but be wrong.

For Daya Krishna,

“Freedom is not the release of a capacity from the restrictions imposed on its exercise through which one achieves the ends which one wants to achieve and which one could not achieve because of those restrictions. Rather, it is a state of continuously enjoyed consciousness which does not seek any end whatsoever and whose freedom is an immediately felt reality expressing itself in the twin facts of being calm and joyous, on the one hand, and of being essentially unaffected by anything else, on the other.”⁸

From the above discussion, it can be said that freedom is an innate right which humans have since their birth. Freedom is not something that can be touched, seen, felt, or reached. All these give a vague idea about freedom. Different people have different opinions, definitions and thoughts about the idea of freedom. Some talk about freedom in a political sense, some talk about social freedom, some about personal independence and some define it as religious freedom. But, the fact that everyone wants to be free, holds free in all cases. Freedom is the choice to live one's life doing what one wants, live where one wants, eat by own choice and learn what one's heart desires. This means that freedom can apply to different aspects of life. Hence, freedom is not an absolute term. In Daya Krishna's words also,

“The problem of freedom may only be resolved by giving up the dream of absolute freedom and accepting the limitation of one freedom by another. The freedom of each is limited by the freedom of everyone else and in this lies the essence of the human situation.”⁹

Works cited:

¹ Krishna,D.(1993). *Social Philosophy Past and Future (SPPF)*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Rashtrapati Nivas, Shimla, p-37.

² Ibid, p-38.

³ Adler. Mortimer. J. (1958). *The Idea of Freedom*, New York,p-254.

⁴ Chandel,Bhuvan. And Sharma,K.L. (1996). *The Philosophy of Daya Krishna*, Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi, pp, 139-149.

⁵ Krishna,D.(1993). *Social Philosophy Past and Future (SPPF)*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Rashtrapati Nivas, Shimla, p-41.

⁶ Krishna,D.(1993). *Social Philosophy Past and Future (SPPF)*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Rashtrapati Nivas, Shimla, P-44.

⁷Vohra, Ashok. (1996). *An Analysis Of The Concept* Sharma,K.L. (1996). *The Philosophy of Daya Krishna*, Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi, pp, 139-149.

⁷ Krishna,D.(1993). *Social Philosophy Past and Of Freedom*, Indian Council Of Philosophical Research, New Delhi, pp, 143-144.

⁸ Krishna,D.(1993). *Social Philosophy Past and Future (SPPF)*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Rashtrapati Nivas, Shimla, p-40

⁹ Krishna,D.(1993). *Social Philosophy Past and Future (SPPF)*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Rashtrapati Nivas, Shimla, pp, 37-38.