



The Notion of Freedom in the Eyes of Swami Vivekananda and Aurobindo Ghosh

Ruhi Sultana

State Aided College Teacher-I [Islampur College, Dist- Uttar Dinajpur]

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Philosophy, Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18267221>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted: 31-12-2025

Published: 10-01-2026

Keywords:

*Divine, Infinite, Holistic,
Self-realization, Inner
Freedom.*

ABSTRACT

The present article entitled as “The Notion of Freedom in the Eyes of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo Ghosh”. In this paper I have explained the concept of freedom, Freedom is the true nature of man, we can't say that it is a quality and is dependent on the soul, rather we may say that freedom is the true nature of the soul. Freedom is not dependent on the soul; the soul is freedom. For Vivekananda, Man is higher and greater than what he is, man is potentially divine and free and he is within in himself; this realization makes to the divinity in man, to realize that he is himself the infinity. we all are potentially unlimited and infinite. Man is free, their action is free and he realized that there is no bondage, no maya, no obstacles in their actions, he feels free. On the other side, Aurobindo is one of our great spiritual persons. It is difficult to summarize Sri Aurobindo's notion of freedom. Aurobindo's concept of freedom is holistic, it is self-realization, it is not only the external freedom but inner freedom also. It is a synthesization of spiritual, social, and political freedom for men.

Introduction:

The meaning of the term ‘freedom’ is ‘state of being free’. The word ‘freedom’ is used as a key concept in Indian philosophy. In Indian philosophy believed ‘moksa’ or liberation is the summum bonum or the highest type of freedom. From their points of views, it can be said that the concept of freedom is mostly ethical and spiritual. On the other hand, in twentieth century's, Indian thinkers use freedom not only in



the sense of 'freedom from' but also in the sense of 'freedom of', 'freedom for', and 'freedom to'. Swami Vivekananda insists of collective liberation. Now the question arises that – how men know the living from the dead? And how can they make the distinction between these? We may say that in the living there is freedom, because there is presence intelligence. On the other hand, in the dead, all is bound and there is no freedom is possible, because there is no intelligence. This freedom which distinguishes us from what we are all striving for. To be freer is the goal of all our efforts, for only in perfect freedom can there be perfection. This effort to attain freedom underlies all forms of worship, whether we know it or not. Liberation is identity with God, the infinite. In the words of Vivekananda, "Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divine within, 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. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details"¹. Moksha cannot be called an individualistic or extra-terrestrial goal. In the end liberation can be best defined as freedom. In the words of Vivekananda, "The idea of freedom is the only true idea of salvation freedom from everything, the senses, whether of pleasure or pain, from good as well as evil. "²

spiritual transformation took place in Aurobindo's life and he leaving politics for spiritual work. He started his journey at first, as a political thinker and became a spiritual integrality. He believed that the best thing of man is for attaining spirituality. Sri Aurobindo has significantly been described as adventure of consciousness. Even in his quest of India's freedom, during the first decade of the last century, he departed courageously from the orthodox and conservative path of the Moderates and infused in the country a new electric force of Nationalism. He chalked out a new path of Swadeshi, boycott, passive resistance, and national education – the path that ultimately came to be adopted as the national program during the subsequent period of the struggle. The true and whole seeing that we find in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy was a result of his attainment of the integral supramental knowledge. Sri Aurobindo had to specially awaken the desire for freedom in the minds of the common people of India and at the same time try to recruit first a select group and then the entire nation in such concerted political activity as to ultimately lead to complete emancipation. He saw the Indian Soul as the Eternal Mother, the mother whose aim not only to awaken the people of India, but who wants to freedom of the whole world. His patriotism was not confined to geographical boundaries, nor was his nationalism confined to a particular nation. He called upon this mother of his to lead all his children throughout the world to the light and grant them the sight of immortality. This is what he thought and struggled for. May God be manifested in the world and in mankind. he took up the path of yoga with the intention of gaining spiritual strength and



radiance and thereby gaining God's help in his life's purposeful work. But gradually his inner spiritual realization gradually grew to such universality that the greater passing completely into transition, his original work became only a partial object, except that the work of emancipation of his country now became the goal of his work worldwide, of which he had only glimpsed before, the work that would then be about the future emancipation of all mankind.

Vivekananda's Concept of Freedom:

Swami Vivekananda, the great Indian legend who is known as mystic, philosopher, educationalist and Yogic saint. Swami Vivekananda's philosophy may be said to partly in the thoughts of Sri Ramkrishna and partly Advaita Vedanta of Saṃkarācārya. From Ramkrishna; Vivekananda learnt service to mankind and on the other hand from Saṃkarācārya he learnt the truth that every man is potentially divine. He mainly focused about man's selfless actions towards the good of all, the action which all man can do with the same selfless attitude. He says every soul is potentially divine and free. The aim is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or mental discipline, - by one, or more, or all of these and be free. Vivekananda correlated ethics with control of the mind, seeing truth, purity and unselfishness as qualities which strengthened it. He said his followers to be divine, pious and unselfish and he emphasised that the way of success was an outcome of focused thought and action. In his lectures on Raja Yoga he said, "Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life-think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success, that is way great spiritual giants are produced".³

Liberation, according to Vivekananda, can be achieved by all the three traditional paths of Jnana Yoga, Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga. In his own circumstances, however, Karma Yoga was the best way to realise liberation. Those who think that Indian philosophy does not find a suitable place for ethics forget that Indian philosophers considered ethics as a part of spiritual goal. Ethics in India did not stop only at the rational limit, it transcended to supra-rational, the spiritual. Thus, freedom is both an ontological as well as moral ideal. As Vivekananda rightly pointed out, "The greatest goodness is the highest freedom. Our aim should be to allow the individual to move towards this freedom"⁴.

Intellectual freedom:

Although the ever – free, pure consciousness is our true Self, or Atman, we don't feel this freedom because of the identification of the Self with the body and mind which are unfree, being governed by the



rigid laws of the universe. This identification is caused by ignorance. Swami Vivekananda has compared ignorance to a dark screen with a small hole which covers a source of light which is the Atman. Through the hole a little light of the Atman manifests itself. This is the source of the urge for freedom we all feel. As the hole becomes larger and larger, more and more light come out. In the same way, as more ignorance is removed, the Atman manifests itself more and we feel greater freedom within. According to Swami Vivekananda, moral actions and spiritual practices help in the manifestation of the Atman and make us free, whereas immoral actions and ignorance obstruct the manifestation of the Atman and make us bound. He announced the reality saying, Work is worship. On reaching the end-state of being or achieving the terminal value, the worshipper and the worshipped merge. God in his absolute nature is not to be worshipped. Worshipping such a God would be nonsense. On the basis of identifying the spiritual values, Vivekananda developed the strategy for the highest spiritual realization in orienting intelligence into knowledge, emotion and drives into love or devotion power of action into action without claiming right to the results and the organizing of the psychic power or yoga. Every individual is endowed with these four faculties, and by training them and by their appropriate application an individual can be spiritualized in terms of actions and in terms of the objective to realize the identity of individuality and the cosmic whole or tattvamasi. As an Advaitin, to Vivekananda there was no qualitative difference between the waking and dreaming experiences. The two states along with the state of deep sleep could become perceivable because Truth Absolute appeared like these three states. If Truth were not there, it would have hardly been possible for the other three states to find their expression. Vivekananda was very clear about the illusory nature of the world of our experience even when he taught us to serve the world. He knew that the served and those who are serving are both in the same illusory state. He was witty enough to say that if he was to dream, let him have a good dream. On the basis of his interpretation of the experiences we may convincingly say that so long as we believe in our birth and death, in good and bad, in the sacred and the secular, let us work, reflecting on the consequences of our action, towards purifying our intellect and mind ultimately to discover the indivisible spirituality manifest as the experiencer and the experienced and achieve the state of dichotomy transcendence.

Spiritual Freedom:

Mysticism, emotion and work are equally present in full in our mind. This, according to Vivekananda, is the idea of perfect man; and the ideal of religion is to become harmoniously balanced in all the four elements which could be attained by yoga or union. "To the worker, it is union between himself and the whole of community; to the mystic, union between his lower Self and higher Self; to the lover, union



between himself and the God of love; and to the philosopher, the unity of all existence”⁵. The man who seeks after this union is a yogi-the worker is the karma-yogi; the devotee, the bhakti-yogi: the mystic, the raja-yogi; and the philosopher is the jñāna-yogi. When the senses are controlled, when they can no longer disturb the mind, the yogi has reached the goal. Our various yoga’s do not conflict with each other, each lead to the same goal, makes us perfect and one needs hearing, thinking and then practising. No one method can suit all, and the different methods are not steps necessary to be taken one after another. Ceremonials are the first form, next is 'God external' and the final means is 'God internal". Gradation may be needed in some cases but generally, only one way is required.

Selfless Action:

Karma-yoga leads to this end, and thus jñāna, bhakti and karma come to the same point. In karma-yoga, one gives up one's whole body, mind and everything as an eternal sacrifice unto the Lord and attains perfect peace. Duty is really attachment; when an attachment has become established. we call it duty. Duty but checks brutality. In karma-yoga, work is not done as duty due to compulsion; the karma- yogi works as a free-being, being unattached, and considers his duties as God's duties. Man should not be judged by his duties, but by the manner and spirit with which he performs them. The work with the sense of duty leads to work without any idea of duty, when it becomes worship. Duty is sweet only when love greases its wheels to avoid friction, and love shines alone in freedom. The secret of work is the identity of means and end. To attain liberation through work, performance of work without desire is the means. “Such work leads to knowledge. which in turn brings emancipation”⁶.

Selfless Devotion:

Bhakti-yoga is a genuine search after the Lord, a search beginning, continuing and ending in love. Jñāna and bhakti converge and finally meet at the same point. Love of God grows and assumes a form called para-bhakti or supreme devotion in which forms vanish, rituals fly away, books are superseded and all limitations and bondage like images, temples, churches. religions, sects, countries and nationalities fall off naturally. The renunciation of things, vairagya, is caused by the great attachment anuraga to God. The central secret of bhakti-yoga is to control feelings and emotions and to give the soul higher and higher direction towards God. Love knows no second, it is for its own sake, it knows no fear and it has no rival.

One may invent an image to worship God, but the living man is an already existing better image. One may build a temple to worship God, but a better, higher one that already exists is the human body. The



moment a man sees God in the temple of every human body, he is free from bondage. Other forms of worship are not errors but stages in the journey from lower truth to higher truth. If we are pure, we cannot see impurity; for, what is within is without, and one cannot see impurity unless it is inside oneself. The human brute does not worship due to his ignorance and the jivanmuktas also do not worship as they have realised God in themselves.

Raja-Yoga:

Raja-yoga is the method of realisation through the mystic union of the lower Self with the higher Self. It restrains the activities of mind and stops them. With the cessation of the activities of mind, attachment and bondage disappear. In the higher stages, Raja-yoga produces certain super-normal powers like anima, mahima, etc., but the aspirant should ignore them and aim only at liberation. The feeling of 'I' belongs to the middle plane and above and below there is no feeling of 'I', yet the mind functions. In deep sleep, man enters the plane below consciousness. His body functions even in the deep sleep stage without the feeling of 'I': When he wakes up, his original sum total of knowledge remains the same without any increase. But when a man goes into samadhi or the superconscious stage, he comes out as a sage, attains metaphysical and transcendental knowledge.

Jñāna-yoga:

There are two birds on the same tree, one on top and the other below. The upper bird is God and the lower is the human soul that eats the sweet and bitter fruits of this world. Now and then a heavy blow attacks the soul then it stops eating and goes towards the unknown God and understands the world as a vain show. But its senses drag it down towards the sweet and bitter fruits of the world. But when an exceptionally hard blow comes, the soul approaches God and thus gradually goes nearer and nearer to Him. Its old self melts away. When the soul comes near enough, it finds that it is none other than God Him-self. Thus jñāna-yoga explains the meaning of 'Thou art that' and tells man that he is essentially divine. The Upaniṣadic text, "The Self is only attained by him whom the Self chooses," means that we are the Self and we choose ourselves.

Aurobindo's Concept of Freedom:

First fourteen years of Sri Aurobindo's life were spent in England to fully master the knowledge and learning of the Western world and to know the insides of the modern scientific age religion there, and the next thirteen years were spent in Baroda to fully prepare for his great service to the country and to reach



the roots of India's heritage and history to realize the meaning of its future history. Then when he came to Bengal and jumped into the political movement, instead of speaking and a unique seer of patriotism. It is a matter of particular interest that the words he used to say during the fiery period of the Bengal movement of 1906-7-8, at the culmination of his yoga life in Pondicherry long after, when he was engaged in trying to bring down Divya Jyoti or Vijnshakti or Atmanas to the earthly world, the birth of a new world and the creation of a new nation in man, he said exactly the same kind of words. In the burning words uttered in the voice of the warm-hearted patriot of the swadeshi period, there was at once the clear expression of the assured emancipation of the forerunner of the divine life of a later age. India's renaissance as well as its active.

Aurobindo defines swaraj as the direct revelation of God to the people. It is not mere political freedom but freedom of the individual, of the community, of the nation, spiritual freedom and social freedom. The ancient sages have declared spiritual freedom, and the social freedom was the message given by Buddha, Caitanya, Nanak, Kabir and the Saints of Maharashtra. Social freedom is the freedom of the human intellect and the nobility of the human soul. Freedom cannot be attained in a land of slaves. "God has set apart India as the eternal fountain-head of holy spirituality"⁷. Thus, swaraj has been revealed to us and by political freedom we should get spiritual freedom.

Aurobindo's Concept of Freedom in Political Perspective:

Swaraj is an organization of national self-help and national self-dependence. When a foreign organism dominates the body-politic, it compels the whole body to consider it as the center of its activities neglecting its functions. This habit of subservience should be replaced by self-help. The village samiti or council should be the organ of executive work. It should set up schools in which that children will grow up as good citizens and patriots and not as dependents in a dependent nation. The life of the village must be self-reliant and self-sufficient; the first condition is the awakening of the political sense of the masses. Finally, swaraj is not possible without the unity of speech, of intellectual conviction, the unity of hearts that spring from love. Absolute equality is non-existent in the world, but the world has tried to counteract the unjust and unnecessary inequalities of the old social order. Aurobindo's ideal is "a free co-operation guided and helped by a wise and liberal central authority expressing the common will, secular, democratic and socialistic, with liberty sacrificed to the need of equality; equality and aggregate efficiency, and the greatest of the three-liberty, equality and fraternity or Inner oneness must take birth in the soul and rise from a hidden and divine depth *within*."⁸



“Human society progresses really and vitally in proportion as law becomes the child of freedom; it will reach its perfection when man having learnt to know and become spiritually one with his fellow-man, the spontaneous law of his society exists only as the outward mould of his self-governed inner *liberty*.”⁹ Without individual freedom society cannot be progressive. The communal man is always conservative and static as his consciousness evolved slowly in the process of suboscine nature. The free individual on the other hand, is able to impart his own creative and mobile consciousness to the mass and facilitates a progressive society. Unity should be the largest principle of life, and freedom its foundation stone. Some kind of confederation of the people for common human ends, for the removal of all causes of strife and differences, for inter-relation and the regulation of mutual aid and interchanges which gives a full internal freedom to each unit is the right principle. A psychical unity is the need for the growth towards a greater unity. It signifies a free development everywhere with a constant friendly interchange, a close understanding, and a feeling of our common humanity and common ideals.

Sri Aurobindo’s political activism had three aspects:

The first thing he embarked on was the formation of a revolutionary party, the main purpose of which would be to prepare for an armed uprising.

Secondly, to inculcate in the people of the entire nation the spirit and desire for complete freedom, which was an ingrained idea among most of the people in those days as impossible words and delusions of madness. Everyone knew then that the British empire was all powerful, India was utterly weak, powerless and weaponless to it, so no such wish could be imagined.

Thirdly, to arouse the people in such a way that by their collective non-cooperation and peaceful opposition, foreign rule from here becomes untenable.

Aurobindo’s Concept of Freedom in Spiritual Perspective:

After coming out of jail, Sri Aurobindo saw that the political situation of the country had completely changed. Most of the nationalist leaders have gone to jail or exiled, signs of demoralization and despair are everywhere, although the spirit inside the country has not died down, but has become more violent as a result of the repression. He resolved to come out and continue the struggle; continued to hold meetings every week; but where formerly thousands of eager listeners had thronged, only a few hundred people gathered, and even among them there was not much life or energy. He went to different districts to give lectures, among which the one he gave in Uttar Para was the first time he openly preached his yoga and spiritual realization. For him, Sri Ramakrishna was the greatest saint because where other saint found only one limited aspect of God, but Ramakrishna saw God in all his unlimited aspects, in an infinitely varied unity. The spiritual feelings of millions of saints of the past were united and revealed in him a



new, he believes the world the essence of Indian Hinduism. With his birth, a new era began in the world, an era in which the people of the world would get a glimpse of the presence of God and spirituality would become the most important thing in life. God has breathed new life here again, great souls have tired to bring liberation to this country, that is why great souls a new change is suddenly seen taking place in the hearts of the children of India. The action which first began as a political liberation will ultimately culminate in spiritual success. According to A. B. Purani, “as most people supposed, that he had retired into some height of spiritual experience devoid of any further interest in the world or in the fate of India. It could not mean that, for the very principle of his Yoga was not only to realise the Divine and attain to a complete spiritual consciousness, but also to take all life and all world activity into the scope of this spiritual consciousness and action and to base life on the Spirit and give it a spiritual meaning.”¹⁰

Self- Sacrifice:

The first condition for success is to adopt such an attitude of complete self-sacrifice. The special sign of the devotion of a true servant of the country will be strict asceticism, untiring and and ruthless renunciation, burning and inextinguishable vision. We will have to offer such a fiery sacrifice that even the greatest sacrifices of the past will like a shadow, and we ourselves will be the master and the sacrifice of that sacrifice. Our lives, our hopes, all our aspirations, everything that is not God’s but our personal belongings, everything that we use for our own interests instead of serving the country, all of it will have to be thrown into that sacrificial fire. The God of sacrifice wants the best among us to be sacrificed, and only then will he be pleased. Whoever fears for himself, fear losing his property, fears losing his relatives, fear losing his glory, interests, reputations, happiness and freedom, should refrain from it, because at any moment the call to surrender everything may come to the stage of sacrifice. If he is then refused, then his condition will be more miserable than that of those who feel for safety, because like the disobedient, he will suffer all the hardships in vain and will fall into utter disgrace. Self-sacrifice is For Aurobindo, “Ceremonial sacrifice is the right means of gaining children, wealth, enjoyment; by ceremonial sacrifice rain is brought down from heaven and the prosperity and continuity of the race assured; life is a continual transaction between the gods and men in which man offers ceremonial gifts to the gods from the gifts they have bestowed on him and in return is enriched, protected, fostered. Therefore, all human works have to be accompanied and turned into a sacrament by ceremonial sacrifice and ritualistic worship; work not so dedicated is accursed, enjoyment without previous ceremonial sacrifice and ritual consecration is a sin. Even salvation, even the highest good is to be gained by ceremonial sacrifice. It must never be abandoned. Even the seeker of liberation has to continue to do



ceremonial sacrifice, although without attachment; it is by ceremonial sacrifice and ritualistic works done without attachment that men of the type of Janaka attained to spiritual perfection *and liberation*.¹¹

Integral Knowledge:

Knowledge is not only a mental process access but a matter of whole being. An integral spiritual consciousness carries in it a knowledge of all the terms of being; it links the highest to the lowest through all the mediating terms and achieves an indivisible whole. The physical, the vital, the mental and finally, the physical, all equally take part in the achievement of knowledge. Any conflict among them leads to ignorance and error. In integral knowledge, there are three steps of self-achievement, which are, at the same, three sides of the same one knowledge. The first is the discovery of the secret psychic entity. The next step is to realize the eternal self in all beings. The third step is to know the Divine being who is at once our supreme transcendent self, the cosmic Being, foundation of our universality and Divinity within.

Conclusion:

Human freedom is generally regarded as having two dimensions: external and internal. External freedom includes political freedom and social freedom. Internal freedom includes intellectual freedom, moral freedom, and spiritual freedom. All these realms of freedom are generally treated as if they were independent of each other. Swami Vivekananda was the first great thinker to show that all these types of freedom are expressions of a single existential urge for freedom derived from the intrinsic freedom of the Atman or true Self. The identification of pure consciousness with mind and body is known as bondage which is the cause of all suffering. The ultimate goal of life is to break this bondage and attain the freedom of pure consciousness. Thus, freedom in traditional Hindu philosophy is an ultimate goal or value. It can be attained only through great struggle and is meant for a few individuals who choose the path of *nivritti* or renunciation. Swami Vivekananda looked upon freedom as a basic, existential urge underlying all life activities. Swamiji argued that, since pure consciousness is the substratum of life, its freedom percolates through mind and body. For Aurobindo, we have to realize divinity within ourselves; we have to build our life in such a way that we can find a suitable field and manifest ourselves. Only then will our duty be complete, Men will understand that the work they have undertaken today is not a political rebellion or just an attempt at a political change, we have been commanded to do God's work. Intellectual knowledge is wholly separative one. Intuition is only a fragmentary glimpse. The logic, knowledge or *gnosis* starts from Truth, knows is directly and hence its truth is self-evident and absolute. Memory, imagination, observation, comparison, contrast, analogy and reasoning and other instruments of



mental knowledge turn into direct intuitive truth-aspiration of totality in Gnosis. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy itself is a reasoned intellectual interpretation of his experience through integral yoga. It is in yoga alone that the spiritual intuition manifests in its fullness and integral knowledge are attained. Yogic knowledge is the authentic knowledge of the divine.

References:

- Vivekananda, Swami. (1946). The complete works of Swami Vivekananda. vol. I. Kolkata, West Bengal: Advaita Ashrama. p-119.
- Vivekananda, Swami. (1947). The complete works of Swami Vivekananda. vol. 6. Kolkata, West Bengal: Advaita Ashrama. p-59.
- Vivekananda, Swami. (1899). Raja Yoga. New York.
- Vivekananda, Swami. (1947). The complete works of Swami Vivekananda. vol. 6. Kolkata, West Bengal: Advaita Ashrama. p-66.
- Vivekananda, Swami. (1899). Jnana-yoga. New York: P-394.
- Vivekananda, Swami. karma-yoga. P-584.
- Ghosh, Sri,Aurobindo. (1972). SABCL.Vol-1. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram. p-701.
- Ghosh, Sri,Aurobindo. (1972). SABCL.Vol-1. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram. p-360.
- Ghosh, Sri,Aurobindo. (1972). SABCL.Vol-1. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram. p-403.
- Purani, A.B. (1958). The Life of Sri Aurobindo. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram. p-261
- Ghosh, Sri, Aurobindo. (1970). Essays on the Gita. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram. P-109.