

The Ethical Self as Dialogue: Reconsidering Freedom in Indian Philosophy Through Daya Krishna

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ABSTRACT

Freedom in Indian philosophy has long been viewed as the ultimate realization of self-awareness and liberation from ignorance. Daya Krishna offers a transformative interpretation of this concept by bringing freedom into the realm of human experience, dialogue, and moral reflection. For him, freedom does not lie in escaping worldly conditions but in understanding and engaging with them consciously. It emerges through awareness, ethical deliberation, and meaningful participation in life. His philosophy replaces metaphysical abstraction with reflective dialogue that connects the self, others, and tradition. The ethical self, therefore, is not static but continually shaped through conversation and moral inquiry. By uniting the classical Indian pursuit of moksha with modern notions of autonomy and responsibility, Daya Krishna presents freedom as a dynamic process of self-realization grounded in reason and ethical creativity. This vision broadens the scope of Indian philosophy by emphasising consciousness, intersubjectivity, and cultural renewal as essential to moral life.

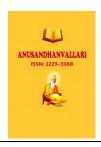
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1. INTRODUCTION

Freedom has always been one of the deepest and most enduring themes in philosophy. Across cultures and centuries, thinkers have asked what it means to live freely and how this condition can be achieved. In Indian philosophy, freedom or moksha has traditionally been regarded as liberation from ignorance and bondage, an awakening of the self that transcends all forms of limitation (Radhakrishnan, 1952, p. 201). Daya Krishna, one of the most distinctive voices in modern Indian thought, brings a fresh dimension to this ancient idea. He treats freedom not as an escape from the world but as a conscious, creative participation in it (Krishna, 1974, p. 112). Daya Krishna's concern with freedom is at once ethical and existential. He shifts the discussion from metaphysical salvation to the moral and reflective capacities of human beings. For him, to be free is to recognize and respond to the conditions that shape one's existence with awareness and responsibility. Freedom does not arise from the removal of all constraints but from the understanding that even within limits, human beings can act meaningfully and thoughtfully (Krishna, 1988, p. 42). This view departs from both traditional Indian idealism and Western rationalism. While Kant defines freedom through the autonomy of reason, Daya Krishna interprets it as a living dialogue between consciousness, action, and context (Krishna, 1991, p. 67).

For Daya Krishna, the foundation of freedom lies in consciousness itself. It is through awareness that individuals transcend the automatic, biological patterns of life. Humans share their physical nature with other creatures, yet their ability to reflect and imagine allows them to transform natural drives into cultural and ethical pursuits. The





sense of freedom thus depends on how individuals relate to their goals, how they interpret success and limitation, and how they engage with their surroundings. In this process, dialogue becomes the most vital expression of moral life. The ethical self, according to Daya Krishna, is formed and renewed through conversation—within the self and with others. Through such dialogue, individuals challenge assumptions, encounter differences, and arrive at a deeper understanding. This dialogical conception of freedom echoes the spirit of Indian philosophical inquiry found in the Upanishads, where truth emerges through questioning and mutual reflection. Yet it also resonates with the modern philosophical demand for openness, critique, and plurality. Daya Krishna's contribution lies in reconciling these two worlds: the spiritual inwardness of Indian philosophy and the rational engagement of modern ethics. He presents freedom as a continuing search for meaning, rooted in awareness and guided by moral imagination.

In this sense, Daya Krishna's philosophy offers a vision of the ethical self as a being that grows through dialogue and reflection. Freedom, for him, is not separation from life but participation in it. It is through conversation, self-examination, and responsiveness that human beings realize their moral autonomy and their capacity to shape the world intelligently.

1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1) To examine Daya Krishna's reinterpretation of the concept of freedom within the framework of Indian philosophy.
- 2) To analyze the dialogical nature of the ethical self as a foundation for moral consciousness and responsibility.
- 3) To explore the various dimensions of freedom—biological, social, ethical, and spiritual—in Daya Krishna's thought.
- 4) To investigate the relationship between self, other, and tradition in the realization of ethical freedom.
- 5) To evaluate the contemporary significance of Daya Krishna's philosophy in understanding human autonomy and ethical dialogue.

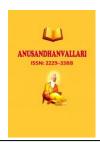
2. METHODOLOGY

To carry out this study in a systematic and thoughtful way, both analytical and qualitative methods have been used. The analytical method helps in understanding and interpreting Daya Krishna's philosophical ideas on freedom, consciousness, and the ethical self. The qualitative approach allows for a deeper reflection on the moral and cultural aspects of his thought. The research is based on both primary and secondary sources, including Daya Krishna's original writings, scholarly articles, books, journals, and reliable online materials. Together, these methods provide a balanced framework for exploring the philosophical depth and relevance of his ideas.

2.1. FREEDOM IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY: DAYA KRISHNA'S INTERPRETATION

The idea of freedom has occupied a central place in Indian philosophy since the Vedic period. In almost every system—Vedānta, Sāṃkhya, Buddhism, or Jainism—freedom (*mokṣa*) is seen as the goal of human life. Traditionally, it represents liberation from ignorance and bondage, the realization of one's true nature beyond duality. The Upaniṣads describe freedom as the knowledge that the self (*Ātman*) and the absolute (*Brahman*) are one (Radhakrishnan, 1952, p. 201). The Bhagavad Gītā adds a moral dimension to this understanding by teaching that inner liberation arises from disciplined action and detachment from desire (Radhakrishnan, 1940, p. 67). In





Buddhism, freedom is defined as *nirvāṇa*, a state of awareness beyond craving and ignorance, while Jainism associate's freedom with the purification of the soul from *karmic* accumulation.

Within this broad tradition, Daya Krishna offers a reinterpretation that brings the question of freedom into the sphere of human experience. In Essays in Indian Philosophy (1974, p. 112), he writes that "freedom arises not in the absence of conditions but in the reflective awareness of them." By this, he means that limitation itself can become the ground of freedom when approached through understanding. Daya Krishna thus transforms the classical idea of metaphysical liberation into a process of ethical and intellectual reflection. Freedom is not an escape from human conditions but the capacity to act meaningfully within them. His philosophy marks a shift from transcendence to immanence. For him, ignorance is not a cosmic illusion but the uncritical acceptance of conventions that govern human life. To overcome ignorance is to awaken the reflective capacity to question one's assumptions and the moral codes inherited from tradition. In Freedom and Reason (1988, p. 47), he observes that "freedom is the ability to deliberate upon one's motives, to see them as one's own, and yet to transcend them through understanding." Freedom, therefore, is not merely the power to act but the power to understand the meaning and implications of one's actions.

In Philosophy and the Human Situation (1984, p. 74), Daya Krishna distinguishes between "freedom as choice" and "freedom as understanding." Freedom as choice is shared with other living beings, for all creatures act on desire and instinct. Freedom as understanding, however, belongs only to reflective consciousness. True freedom begins when human beings act with awareness, guided by reason and self-examination. This interpretation brings his thought close to Kant's moral philosophy but situates it within the dialogical and relational spirit of Indian thought, where reflection is always tied to conversation and ethical responsibility.

He extends this idea through the ancient Indian practice of samvāda or dialogue. In Dialogues with the Dead (1998, p. 23), he argues that truth in philosophy is not discovered through isolation but through questioning and exchange. Dialogue is both a method and an expression of freedom. When one engages in dialogue—with oneself, with others, and with tradition—one's understanding evolves and deepens. Freedom, therefore, is an ongoing conversation within consciousness, not a static condition. The ethical self becomes a living dialogue, continuously examining and redefining itself through reflection. Daya Krishna also warns against two dominant modern misunderstandings of freedom: the objectivist and the communitarian. The objectivist approach treats freedom as the capacity to achieve goals, ignoring the ethical and emotional dimensions of human life. The communitarian approach confines freedom within collective ideals or traditional norms. Against both, he asserts that freedom is a conscious act of reflection and deliberation shaped through dialogue (Krishna, 1991, p. 69). It is not determined by external success or social conformity but by the inner depth of understanding. Contemporary studies on Daya Krishna have shown that his reflections on freedom extend beyond traditional metaphysical interpretation. They highlight how writings such as Freedom, Reason, Ethics and Aesthetics (2001, p. 156) unify rational selfdetermination with moral creativity. These interpretations reveal that Daya Krishna's view of freedom is not a theoretical construct, but a living ethical process rooted in dialogue and reflection. Similarly, An Account of Daya Krishna's Understanding of Desire and Freedom (2020, p. 2146) explores how he reinterprets the puruṣārtha framework, demonstrating that human desire and moral responsibility are inextricably linked in the pursuit of freedom. Through these insights, his philosophy continues to shape the understanding of ethical dialogue in contemporary Indian thought.

Culture, according to Daya Krishna, is not an enemy of freedom but its medium. Human beings live within inherited languages, customs, and traditions, yet these can always be reinterpreted and renewed. Freedom lies not in rejecting cultural identity but in transforming it through critical awareness. The task of philosophy, therefore, is to sustain a living dialogue between inherited wisdom and present understanding. Through this reinterpretation, Daya Krishna reconciles the classical Indian quest for *mokşa* with the modern search for moral autonomy.





Freedom becomes the process of realizing meaning within the conditions of life—a dialogue between consciousness and circumstance. It is not detachment from the world but active participation in it, where reflection, understanding, and ethical imagination enable the self to become truly free.

2.2. THE DIALOGICAL NATURE OF THE ETHICAL SELF

In Daya Krishna's philosophy, the self is not an isolated or fixed entity but a dynamic consciousness that defines itself through interaction and reflection. He moves beyond the classical idea of an unchanging essence and presents the self as relational, evolving, and responsive. The ethical dimension of human life arises precisely from this relational and dialogical structure of existence. Through conversation, questioning, and openness to alternative perspectives, the self develops moral awareness and freedom.

In the Indian philosophical tradition, truth has never been a matter of solitary contemplation but of collective reflection. The Upanishads demonstrate this through the method of *samvāda*, or philosophical dialogue between teacher and student. Daya Krishna revitalises this ancient approach in the modern world. In Dialogues with the Dead (1998, p. 23), he explains that philosophy should remain an open conversation that transcends temporal, cultural, and personal boundaries. The ethical self thus arises not from rigid doctrines but from the willingness to engage in continuous dialogue. For him, dialogue is not only a mode of communication but also a form of moral life that connects self-understanding with ethical responsibility. Daya Krishna identifies three essential dimensions of dialogue: dialogue with the self, with others, and with tradition.

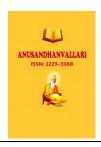
The first level, dialogue with oneself, is a process of introspection and self-questioning. Through this inner conversation, one examines motives, desires, and actions. In Freedom and Reason (1988, p. 47), Daya Krishna notes that freedom involves the ability to deliberate upon one's motives and to transcend them through understanding. This inward reflection is not simply a psychological exercise but a moral one. It enables the individual to free oneself from impulsive action and act with awareness and responsibility. The self becomes ethical when it can interrogate its own beliefs and assumptions.

The second dimension is dialogue with others. Human beings are inherently relational, and moral understanding emerges in the space between self and others. Daya Krishna recognizes that genuine dialogue with others requires openness, empathy, and humility. Through conversation, one learns to recognize the other as a moral subject rather than an object of one's own thought. This perspective resonates with Martin Buber's concept of the "I—Thou" relationship (1937, p. 54), in which the self finds its wholeness only through an authentic encounter with another person. Similarly, Emmanuel Levinas, in Totality and Infinity (1961, p. 66), argues that ethical responsibility begins when the self-encounters the face of the other and feels the call of moral obligation. Daya Krishna's vision of dialogue aligns with these insights, suggesting that selfhood is realized through openness and moral recognition rather than through domination or self-assertion.

The third level of dialogue is with tradition. Every individual inherits a body of cultural meanings, symbols, and moral frameworks that shape identity and thought. Daya Krishna does not see tradition as a closed authority but as a living conversation between generations. In Indian Philosophy: A Counter Perspective (1991, p. 69), he insists that tradition must be questioned, interpreted, and renewed. The ethical self must converse with the past critically, not to reject it but to make it meaningful in the present. Through this engagement, the self participates in the ongoing evolution of culture and values. Dialogue with tradition, therefore, preserves continuity while fostering creativity and moral growth.

The ethical self thus becomes a being-in-conversation, constantly evolving through these three relationships. It does not achieve perfection or finality but remains open to self-correction and growth. This openness itself is the





essence of ethical maturity. To question, to listen, and to respond sincerely are the acts that define moral freedom. Daya Krishna's conception of freedom as dialogue resonates with Jürgen Habermas's idea of communicative rationality (The Theory of Communicative Action, 1984, p. 86), which proposes that understanding and moral consensus are achieved through genuine communication rather than through coercion or authority. Both thinkers recognize that ethics depends upon dialogue sustained by respect, reason, and the willingness to revise one's views.

Contemporary studies on Daya Krishna emphasize this dialogical dimension of his thought. In Freedom, Reason, Ethics and Aesthetics (2001, p. 156), his reflections reveal that ethics arises from the interrelationship between rational thought and creative participation in life. The article An Account of Daya Krishna's Understanding of Desire and Freedom (2020, p. 2146) explore how dialogue enables individuals to integrate desire, value, and moral responsibility, showing that ethical life is a dynamic and interpretive process. These interpretations confirm that for Daya Krishna, dialogue is not merely a philosophical method but the very structure of moral existence. Through this dialogical framework, Daya Krishna brings together the Indian concern for self-realization and the modern emphasis on intersubjective communication. The self is understood as both individual and universal, grounded in personal reflection yet constantly shaped by its relation to others and to tradition. Freedom in this context is not isolation but meaningful engagement with the world. The ethical self grows through conversation, empathy, and the courage to question.

Ultimately, the dialogical nature of the self-reveals that ethics is an open journey rather than a set of fixed principles. The ability to think, to question, to listen, and to transform oneself through dialogue constitutes the highest expression of freedom. Daya Krishna's vision invites humanity to understand moral life as an unending conversation between awareness and existence, through which both the individual and the world attain deeper understanding and harmony.

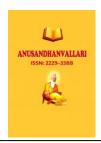
2.3. DIMENSIONS OF FREEDOM

In Daya Krishna's philosophy, freedom is not a single concept that can be defined in abstract terms. It is a complex, evolving, and deeply human process that unfolds through awareness, responsibility, and understanding. Freedom is not achieved by escaping conditions but by engaging consciously with them. In Freedom and Reason (1988, p. 47) and Essays in Indian Philosophy (1974, p. 112), Daya Krishna observes that freedom arises from the reflective awareness of one's circumstances rather than their absence. It is this awareness that allows individuals to live meaningfully within the limits of their existence.

The first dimension of freedom is biological and psychological. Every human being shares with other living creatures certain biological instincts and drives. Yet unlike other beings, humans possess self-consciousness, the ability to reflect upon their desires and actions. Through this capacity, instinct is transformed into intention, and natural impulses become subject to moral reflection. Daya Krishna explains that when individuals become aware of their limitations, they begin to act freely. The recognition of necessity itself becomes a source of freedom. In Essays in Indian Philosophy (1974, p. 118), he argues that freedom is possible even within constraint, because reflection allows one to reinterpret and give meaning to necessity.

The second dimension is social and cultural. Freedom cannot be understood outside the context of the social world in which one lives. Every person acts within a web of customs, traditions, and institutions that shape both possibilities and restrictions. Daya Krishna insists that culture is not an enemy of freedom but its foundation. In Indian Philosophy: A Counter Perspective (1991, p. 69), he explains that human beings realize their autonomy by engaging critically with the values and norms of their culture. True freedom involves questioning inherited beliefs, not rejecting them blindly. The individual and culture exist in a creative relationship: culture provides meaning,





while the individual renews it through interpretation. This view recalls the Indian tradition of *samvāda*, or dialogue, where understanding is born from mutual questioning. The ethical self, discussed in the previous chapter, matures in this interaction with society and tradition.

The third dimension is ethical and rational. Freedom acquires depth only when it is guided by reason and moral awareness. In Freedom, Reason, Ethics and Aesthetics (2001, p. 156), Daya Krishna states that real freedom arises not from instinct or habit but from understanding and reflection. Ethical freedom is the capacity to deliberate on one's motives and to act in the light of that deliberation. It involves responsibility, self-control, and the courage to examine the moral implications of one's actions. This idea is comparable to Immanuel Kant's notion of autonomy as self-legislation, though Daya Krishna's approach is grounded in lived experience rather than abstract logic. He presents freedom as the realization of reason within human life, achieved through reflection and moral dialogue.

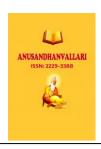
Another dimension of freedom in Daya Krishna's thought is spiritual and existential. He reinterprets traditional Indian notions of liberation, such as moksha, not as escape from worldly life but as conscious participation in it. In Essays in Indian Philosophy (1974, p. 118), he writes that the sense of limitation is inherent to human existence, yet it is through accepting this limitation that one learns to act freely. Freedom, in this sense, is not separation from the world but the ability to find meaning within it. The Bhagavad Gita expresses a similar insight when it teaches that detachment means self-mastery rather than withdrawal (Radhakrishnan, 1940, p. 67). Daya Krishna's interpretation transforms metaphysical liberation into a lived moral consciousness, rooted in awareness and engagement. He also makes an important distinction between freedom as choice and freedom as understanding. In Philosophy and the Human Situation (1984, p. 74), he explains that all living beings possess freedom as choice, the ability to select among alternatives. However, only human beings are capable of freedom as understanding, which involves moral reasoning and self-awareness. Freedom as understanding goes beyond external action to question the meaning and purpose of those actions. It is the foundation of ethical responsibility, for it connects knowledge, intention, and action into a unified moral experience.

Freedom, therefore, is multidimensional. The biological, social, ethical, and spiritual dimensions together form an integrated view of human life. Each aspect contributes to the unfolding of consciousness that Daya Krishna identifies as the essence of freedom. As An Account of Daya Krishna's Understanding of Desire and Freedom (2020, p. 2146) observes, his philosophy transforms freedom from a metaphysical ideal into an experiential journey that develops through reflection and dialogue. It is an ever-expanding awareness that harmonizes instinct with understanding, individuality with culture, and reason with compassion. Through this multidimensional view, Daya Krishna presents freedom as a continuous act of moral creativity. It is neither a possession nor an abstract ideal but a living process through which human beings interpret and shape their existence. Freedom grows as understanding deepens. It is realized not in isolation but in the conscious and ethical participation of the self within the world.

3. CONCLUSION

The concept of freedom in Daya Krishna's philosophy is a living and dynamic reality that grows through reflection, awareness, and moral understanding. It is not a fixed or abstract idea that can be achieved once and for all, but a continuous human process shaped by consciousness and experience. Throughout his writings, Daya Krishna redefines freedom as an activity of the mind and the heart, rooted in dialogue, self-examination, and engagement with the world. For him, freedom is inseparable from the ethical self because both arise from the same act of questioning and reflection. The truly free person can think independently, act responsibly, and participate consciously in the moral and cultural life of humanity.





Daya Krishna moves away from the traditional notion of liberation that was often interpreted as withdrawal or detachment from worldly life. He places freedom within the realm of lived experience, where the individual interacts constantly with the conditions of existence. Freedom begins not with the denial of limits but with their recognition. To be aware of the circumstances that shape one's life is already beginning to transcend them. In this sense, freedom is an inner awakening that transforms one's relation with the world. It is through awareness that the individual learns to live meaningfully within the boundaries of life rather than in opposition to them. For Daya Krishna, the self-achieves freedom through dialogue. The self is not a solitary entity that exists apart from others but a being that becomes complete through communication and reflection. Dialogue with oneself brings selfunderstanding, dialogue with others brings moral sensitivity, and dialogue with tradition brings continuity and renewal. The ethical self is born out of this threefold dialogue, which keeps moral life open, reflective, and responsive. Freedom, therefore, is not only a private condition but also a shared responsibility. It grows through conversation, empathy, and the willingness to listen and learn from others. The dimensions of freedom that Daya Krishna explores show how this process touches every aspect of human life. The biological and psychological dimensions remind us that freedom must begin from within the conditions of human nature. The social and cultural dimensions reveal that individuals realize freedom through participation in shared systems of meaning. The ethical dimension gives freedom its depth through reflection and responsibility, while the spiritual dimension adds the awareness that freedom also requires inner peace and acceptance. Together, these dimensions portray freedom as a harmonious balance between thought, action, and understanding.

Daya Krishna's vision of freedom is both realistic and transformative. He does not deny human limitations but teaches how it can become a source of creativity and growth. Freedom, in his philosophy, is the art of living thoughtfully and ethically within the complexity of life. It is not given by society or by any external force but is created through reflection, dialogue, and moral courage. The ethical self, guided by understanding and responsibility, is always in the process of becoming free. In this view, freedom is not the end of human striving but its most meaningful expression. It is the continuous realization of self-awareness and moral integrity in an ever-changing world. Through reflection, engagement, and compassion, Daya Krishna reminds us that freedom is both the foundation and the fulfilment of human life. It is the way through which individuals discover their humanity and their capacity to create meaning within the shared fabric of existence.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

None

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None

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