

CHAPTER- III

PRAGMATISM AND LOGICAL POSITIVISM

The word 'Pragmatism' is derived from the Greek word 'Pragma' which means 'things done'. It is the subjective idealistic view in modern philosophy. Due to its practical utility it determines the value of truth and solves the philosophical problems by comparing its practical problems. It is a theory of truth. Let us discuss in this chapter Pragmatism and Logical positivism and compare these two views with the Cārvāka materialism.

According to James, the word pragmatism is derived from the Greek word "npayvia" which means 'practice' or 'action'. The theory of pragmatism is the major contribution of America to the world of philosophy. It influenced thinkers like George Simmel, Wilhelm Ostwald, Edmund Husserl, Hansvaihinger, Richard Muller-Freinfels, Hanshahn, Giovanni Papini, Giovanni Vailati, Henry Bergson and Edouard Le Roy. The theory of Cārvākas gave the sensualistic standard of pleasure as the guiding principle of morality so it is the major contribution to the Indian philosophical world. Pragmatism has similarity with the Cārvākas' view on

the point that both the views gave emphasis on practical consequences. Pierce says that according to William James “*Pragmatism means the end of man is action.*”¹ It will be shown now that there are close similarities between Pragmatism and Cārvāka philosophy. The pragmatists say that the root of knowledge is found in experience. Some say that ‘experience’ means sense experience alone. James begins his empiricism by stating sense experience as the only ultimate source of knowledge and sensible things as the only realities directly known. “*These percepts, these ‘termini’ these sensible things, these matters of acquaintance are the realities we ever directly know.*”² Again he takes wider view of sensation and says, ‘percepts as the only realm of reality’ and treats concepts as a coordinate realm. He includes not only perception and conception but also our feelings of activity (such as sustaining, persevering, striking, anticipating, excepting, fearing, doubting and all moral, aesthetic feelings). Everything that we directly feel has practical consequence. He calls this view “radical empiricism” and the all inclusive stuff “pure experience”.³ He again says “*Pragmatist theory of truth is a step of first rate importance in making radical empiricism prevail.*”⁴

Experience is a neutral entity which is neither mental nor material. "Inference according to pragmatists is circuituous.". It prolongs the experiment. It delays action; it tests a truth claim not directly by acting on it but by the meditation of other judgments. According to Cārvākas, in the world of experience, we often perceive two things together e.g. smoke and fire together in the kitchen. We also perceive that when one of them is absent the other is also absent. In this way, we come to know universal concomitance which serves as the basis of inference. But the things of the transcendental world remain completely beyond the domain of our ordinary perception and no knowledge of universal concomitance between two things of that world is possible. Therefore, inference about the things of the transcendental world is not possible as there is no knowledge of universal concomitance as its basis. But though Cārvākas recognize the validity of inference relating to worldly things, they regard the results of such inferences as simply probable. There is no certainty about them. This view of Cārvākas about inference is closely similar to the view of the pragmatists. These Western philosophers maintain that any general truth established regarding any object of ordinary experience is never certain. It is always probable.

It has been discussed earlier that according to the Cārvākas, perception is the only source of knowledge and there is nothing else except what is perceived by the senses. They rejected other means of valid knowledge such as inference (anumāna) and verbal testimony (śabda). According to them, inference is “a mere leap in the dark.” Charles. S. Pierce, the founder of American Pragmatism once said, “I myself happen in common with a small but select circle, to be a pragmatist, or radical empiricist and as such I do not (as I think) perceive and I am far from believing the whole of that.” It is thus seen that the Cārvāka pragmatic hedonism though as old as the Vedas and Upaniṣads is a more or less consistent theory. The Cārvākas admit that we have immediate knowledge of our mental states and processes through internal perception and on the basis of these mental states and processes we have direct knowledge of consciousness. So the existence of consciousness can be proved by perception, but the existence of any immaterial unchanging soul substance as the substratum of consciousness cannot be perceived and as such its existence cannot be proved. Consciousness is an emergent quality of the body; it is not a quality of a non-perceptible transcendental substance called soul. When a living body is formed by the combination of the four perceptible elements e.g. earth, water, fire and air, then

in that body a new quality emerges, which is known as consciousness. The pragmatists however, do not deny consciousness. In his celebrated article, James asks, “*Does consciousness exist?*”⁵ He affirms that consciousness is “the name of a non-entity and has no right to a place among first principles.” But though denying consciousness as an entity of this kind, James does not deny it altogether. He says that to “deny the word stands for an entity, but I say, it does stand for a function”. C.E Moore says, “When I perceive a room or remember it or imagine it, it is just the room which appears and there is no additional appearance of the consciousness of the room. Consciousness is nothing but a description of the presence of the room in the stream of experiences constituting my biography; it is the room in the context of other experiences of mine.”

James does not find in internal perception any such phenomena, but he feels breathing and other internal activities as always going on out of which philosophers constructed the imaginary entity which they call consciousness. They admit “*consciousness is diaphanous or transparent.*”⁶

When we perceive a bed, it is the bed that is present in the mind and not any consciousness of it just as when we see through a glass we see the object and not the

glass. James unlike empiricists is not a materialist. He warns his readers against a materialistic interpretation of his empiricism. In his psychology and later works, he has explained 'consciousness' and self in terms of physiological experiences and goes to the length of replacing Kant's 'I think' by 'I breathe'. What still stands in between his position and materialism is his neutralism, his theory that matter like mind is also a construction out of neutral experience.

*"Pragmatism' says Schiller, provides ethical basis of metaphysics, by making will, conduct and practical consequences the basis of human life and its values. Ethics is the most fundamental of all sciences, and ethical questions should be solved by their practical bearings, by consequences empirically observed in life."*⁷

The very first result of the pragmatic approach to ethics is the denial of eternal and transcendental values, the abstract idea of the ultimate good. *"Ethics should help man, regulate enjoyment in the light of the scientific knowledge of consequences and not simply formulate theories."*⁸ All goods are inherent in human nature, and they are good until they are the means of good and desirable results in life. So all goods are instrumental. There is nothing essentially good i.e. good for its own sake without reference to the practical result it

produces. They do not identify good with immediate pleasure. The ideal state of affairs must have enlightened control of life in all its aspects.

There must be reconstruction of economic, political and religious institutions which must fully utilize scientific knowledge. We find in D. M. Dutta's writing that Dewey writes in his book, *Freedom and Culture* "there must be international understanding, for securing and maintaining peace, freedom, democracy and all the values that civilization has taught man to prize"⁹. Pragmatists say that the world can be made better for man if he exerts his free will. This doctrine is called Meliorism (melior = better) to distinguish it from pessimism (pessimus – worst) and optimism (optimus – best). Meliorism will be accepted by all, who practice self improvement and social reform and realize the ideals, and would show that the world can be really made better. But the materialist Cārvākas considers enjoyment of sensual pleasure to be the highest good of life. Hiriyana says, "It draws away man's mind altogether humble thought of a higher life and fix it upon the world of sense."¹⁰ Man makes a compromise with evil instead of overcoming it. Man is so impatient of obtaining pleasure that he even tries to secure freedom from pain. Cārvākas are advocates of Gross Egoistic Hedonism; they seek not universal pleasure but own

pleasure; there is no place of practical life of temperance, self control, spiritual discipline and gratification of passions.

According to Pragmatism, there are various possibilities regarding the exact nature of God. God, the Supreme power, who has various other super human forces, is responsive to the needs of man and co-operative with him for the salvation of the world. James remarks, "The original polytheism of mankind sublimated itself into monotheism and monotheism has viewed God as helper *"primus inter pares in the midst of all shapers of the great world's fate."*¹¹

*"Pragmatism can be religious, if you allow that religion can be pluralistic or melioristic in type."*¹² But everyone has to take decision himself, what form of religion suits him because *"evidence for God lies primarily in inner personal experiences."*¹³

James says, religion is primarily a matter and necessity of life. It is a biological reaction. A religious man may express his thoughts differently, but he may have the same feelings and conduct. When we survey the whole field of religion, we find a great variety in the thoughts that have prevailed there but the feelings on one hand and conduct on the other are almost always the same.

“Religion in her fullest exercise of function, is not a mere illumination of facts already elsewhere given , not a mere passion , like love, which views things in a rosier light. It is indeed that, as we have seen abundantly. But it is something more, namely a postulator of new facts as well. The world interpreted religiously is not the materialistic world over again, with an altered expression; it must have over and above altered expression, a natural constitution different at some point from that which a materialistic world would have. It must be such that different events can be expected in it, different conduct must be required. This thoroughly pragmatic view of religion has usually been taken as simple matter of course by common men.”¹⁴

Throughout his work, James propagated that pragmatism was immensely right in theory because it constituted in practice a philosophy that is a far more demanding an option for many persons. Similarly, according to the Cārvākas, what they do in practice is right whether it conforms to the norms of the society or not. To keep extra-marital affairs is wrong according to the norms of the society, but Cārvākas say if one gets pleasure then nothing is wrong in being involved in sensual enjoyment, because pleasure is the summum bonum of life. Similarly, Cārvākas regard what they

practice or do is right because their motto is enjoying as much as possible until death comes.

James tries to interpret each concept by tracing its practical consequences. Similarly, Cārvākas try to interpret each concept by tracing its practical consequences. A man takes alcohol and says he has not taken it and gets maximum pleasure but tells others that he is not drunk; this for the Cārvākas is not wrong for according to them, to get pleasure is man's motto, whether he tells lie or not. After the death of the body, the soul also gets destroyed and nobody can go to heaven or hell. After the death of the body, the body becomes ashes, so the Cārvākas try to interpret each concept by its practical utility.

Materialism means the denial of eternal moral order and letting loss of ultimate hope. In Cārvākas view there is no virtue or vice. The welfare of the nation is merely a fiction, or a nightmare. For the Pragmatists, "truth is made just as health, wealth and strength are made in the course of experience."

*"Man is thus found to be the maker of realities and truth. Realities are not found by us readymade but are made by us."*¹⁵ In their view also, the act of committing a

crime may hold no truth, because “truth in reality is just a creation of man’s mind.”

According to James, “pragmatism is a revolt against the static metaphysics.” Similarly, the theory of Cārvākas revolted against the blind acceptance of dogmas without subjecting them to critical examination and careful scrutiny, this theory gave a death blow to all traditional thoughts and values, and thus created the need for rethinking and revaluation, necessary for all living philosophy.

Pragmatism is chiefly a theory of knowledge, a new conception of the nature, meaning and function of the knowing process. It is a revolt against intellectualism or rationalism of the Absolute Idealist and therefore often described as anti-intellectualism. Similarly, the theory of Cārvākas has its novelty in challenging all the traditional values.

Let us now look at the logical positivism and try to find out its similarities with the Cārvāka school of thought.

The twentieth century movement is sometimes called logical or Linguistics Empiricism. In a narrower sense it carries the name of the Vienna circle. Certain thinkers as Rudolf Carnap, Herbert Feigh, Otto Neurath, Moritz

Schlick and Frederick Waisman formed an influential study group in Vienna in early 1920s to unite and to spread the group's positive ideas. In the broader sense, Logical Positivism includes Non-Viennese thinkers as A.J. Ayer, C.W. Morris, Arne Naess and Earnest Nagel.

The central idea of the movement's doctrine is the principle of verifiability, or the verification principle. Logical positivism can be seen as a natural outgrowth of radical British Empiricism and Logical Atomism. It is the driving force of positivism and attachment to the verifiability criterion for the meaningfulness of cognitive statements. When they accepted this principle, they were led to reject many assertions of religion, morality and metaphysics.

By the early thirties it had become widespread as the ideological basis of the neo-positivist philosophy of science in bourgeoisie scientific circles. Since the late thirties the centre of logical positivism has moved in the U.S.A, where it is formed in a considerably modified form as compared with the days of the Vienna circle and is known as Logical Empiricism. It was succeeded to empirical criticism and general subjective idealist tradition originating from Berkeley and Hume. According to this principle, a scientific philosophy is

possible only as a logical analysis of the language of science.

The function of Logical analysis is –

1. To get rid of metaphysics (philosophy in the traditional sense)
2. To investigate the logical structure of scientific knowledge in order to determine the empirically verifiable scientific concepts and assertions.

The ultimate object of this investigation was-

- I) The reorganization of the scientific knowledge within a system known as the unity of science.
- II) The eradication of the distinctions between the separate sciences viz., physics, biology, psychology, sociology etc.
- III) To regard the logical mathematics as ‘formal sciences’ not as knowledge of the world but as a collection of ‘analytical’ assertions, which make the rules of formal transformation.

In the early thirties, logical positivism tried to free itself of some of the unpleasant effects of the principle of the “*protocol statement*”. It accepted the conception of physicalism, but this did not change the subjective nature of philosophy. Carnap, Reichenbach, and others tried to investigate moral judgements by means of

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formal logic and the methodologies used by the neo-positivists in the natural and the exact sciences. The result was – a) the treatment of moral phenomena to extreme simplification of their nature and to a number of scientifically inconsistent conclusions. b).The origin and development of morality were left uninvestigated and unexplained. c) The advocates of logical positivism in ethics ignored the fact that morality is a special form of social relations and consciousness; they made the moral language the only object of their studies. d) They made the scope of ethics narrow, which led false interpretation of moral concepts and judgments; for example, good and evil are not perceived by the sense organs or by observation and experiment. Therefore, according to them these concepts have no meaning at all. e).They regarded that these moral judgments are “*meaningless*” or “*pseudo judgments*” for these judgments cannot be verified. f) Thus their methodology led to general nihilistic conclusions on morality. The overemphasis on the verifiability principle has led to the logical positivists to reject religion, morality as well as metaphysics.

It might be remarked that the Cārvākas also rejected all transcendental realities; God, Soul, Morality, Heaven and Hell, vice and virtue and thus the outlook of both are found to be the same.

Logical positivists gave attachment to the verifiability criterion for the meaningfulness of cognitive statements. Positivists are radical empiricists and perceptionists. Similarly, Cārvākas also regarded perception as the only valid pramāṇa.

Logical positivists made the scope of ethics narrow, which led false interpretation of moral concepts and judgments since good and evil cannot be the object of perception by the sense organs or by observation and experiment. Similarly there are no vice and virtue according to the Cārvākas. They regarded moral concepts meaningless; similarly the Cārvākas also regarded the moral concepts meaningless. The methodology of logical positivists led to general nihilistic conclusions, Cārvākas are also nihilistic because they deny all the transcendental realities. They doubt in the existence of everything and the extreme Cārvākas even doubt perception as the source of Pramāṇa.

Inference about the things of the transcendental world is not possible for there is no knowledge of universal concomitance as its basis. But though some Cārvākas recognize the validity of inference relating to worldly things, they regard the results of such inferences as simply probable and they admit no certainty about them. This view about inference parallels the views of

modern logical positivists and the pragmatists of the western world. These western philosophers maintain that any general truth regarding any object of ordinary experience is never certain; it is always probable. We cannot claim here that all the evidences necessary for the complete proof of such truth have been observed. So the view expressed by the Cārvākas about inference is very important and relevant in the context of modern trend of thought.

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