

THE SUPREME END OF HUMAN LIFE ACCORDING TO CĀRVĀKA SCHOOL: A CRITICAL STUDY

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In Indian philosophy, we come across along standing burning controversy among the different philosophical schools regarding the supreme end of human life. All the philosophical schools excepting Cārvāka consider Mokṣaas the ultimate or supreme end of human life but the Cārvāka School recognises Kāma or pleasure as the ultimate end of us. This paper will address this issue with utmost logical analysis and ultimately substantiate the Cārvākaview.

Key word: Lokāyata, Materialism, Kāma, Svabhāva-vāda, Ānvīkṣikī.

Indian Philosophy is essentially goal oriented. All Indian philosophical discussion is mainly centred around the ultimate goal of our life. They principally address the two questions – (i) what should be the ultimate goal of our life, and (ii) how can this goal be attained? We come across a sharp contradiction between the view of the Cārvāka School and the view of the rest so far as the answers to these questions are concerned.

The Cārvākas think that if liberation means cessation from all kinds of sufferings, then that is possible only through death. So according to them “death alone is liberation (*marāṇamevāpavargaḥ*)”¹. We can find a summary of the philosophy of Cārvāka School through *Sarva-Darśana-Saṁgraha* which is written by Madhavacharya (14th century A. D). But it should be noted that as the original writings of this school are lost, *Sarva- Darśana-Saṁgraha* only collects the views which are claimed to be the views of the Cārvāka School by the other philosophical schools. But it is worthy to note that all other schools point out the view of the Cārvāka School in the course of their criticism keeping this school as *pūrvapakṣī*. So there is every possibility that the view of the Cārvāka School has been misrepresented by them to substantiate their respective position. Quite naturally the true picture of the view of Cārvāka School has not been depicted so far. So we have only a caricature rather than a true picture of the Cārvāka view.

First of all, we have to focus on the term ‘Cārvāka’, because through which we may find some basic idea about Cārvāka school concerning the nature of ultimate goal of human life. In Indian Philosophy Cārvākas are generally known as materialists and Bṛhaspati is considered as the founder of this philosophical school. If we look to *Sarva-Darsana-Saṁgraha* it seems that ‘Lokāyata’ is another synonym of Cārvāka which can be etymologically analysed as “prevalent in the world”². Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya in his book ‘Lokāyata: A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism’, has argued that

Lokāyata meant not only the philosophy of the people but also the philosophy of this-worldliness or materialism”³. In this book, Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya has pointed out many other observations about them. We come across one view that is the term *Cārvāka* itself is a proper name and who is also the founder of that philosophical system. According to another view, the term *Cārvāka* is not a proper name rather it is a common name for those persons who believe in the principle ‘eat drink and be merry’.

The *Hindu* religious texts along with the other Indian philosophical school propose for four *Puruṣārtha* in our life. These are *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma*, *Mokṣa*. The philosophical school like Advaita Vedānta, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas, Sāṃkhya etc. consider *Mokṣa* as the supreme *Puruṣārtha* and the rest ones are the helping condition for the attainment of *Mokṣa*. But the *Cārvākas* School reject *Mokṣa* and *Dharma* altogether and accept *Kāma* and *Artha*. Between the two *Kāma* has been taken as the supreme *Puruṣārtha* and *Artha* as the helping condition to the satisfaction of *Kāma*. But it is worthy to note that the ethical theory of the *Cārvāka School* is diametrically opposed to that of the Advaita Vedānta, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas and so on because the metaphysics of *Cārvāka School* is completely different from that of the latter school. In fact, the *Cārvāka* ethical theory is inevitable corollary of the *Cārvākam* metaphysics. According to the *Cārvāka* metaphysics matter is the only ultimate reality. There is no soul independent of and other than the matter. The so-called soul in fact is nothing but consciousness produced out of the combination of the four material elements in a particular proportion. So, at the time of death when that particular proportion gets dissolved the consciousness or soul also is destroyed. This *Cārvāka* philosophical view implies two things- there is no room for *Mokṣa* in our life and secondly, enjoyment of life should be the only motto of us.

Many other schools believe that the so-called liberation or *Mokṣa* is the supreme *Puruṣārtha* of human life. Accordingly, to them this *Mokṣa* or *Mukti* is of two kinds – *Videhamukti* and *Jīvanmukti*. Here both of them directly refer to absolute cessation from sufferings. The former one can be achieved only after death and the latter one can be achieved within this life. But *Cārvākas* reject both of these views. According to *Cārvākas* ‘perception’ is the only valid source of knowledge. They admit that the existence of consciousness should be proved by perception. It is produced when the elements such as earth, water, fire and air are combined in a particular proportion. “Consciousness is the result of an emergent and dialectical evolution. It is an epi-phenomenon, a by-product of matter. Given the four elements and their particular combination, consciousness manifests itself in

the living body. ’’⁴ That is why, we can say that the so-called soul is nothing but the conscious living body which has been called “*caitanya-viśiṣṭa-dehaeva ātmā*”⁵. Now if conscious living body itself is soul, then it clearly implies that after the death of this body there can be no soul. So, the concept of *Videhamukti* as it is observed by some thinkers cannot be accepted. Again, on the other hand if liberation means absolute freedom from sufferings in this very life, it is also not possible to accept, because our worldly life is essentially a mixture of happiness as well as suffering. So, we can only try to reduce our suffering and enjoy as much happiness as possible. An intelligent person takes fish in spite of its bone, he does not reject the same for fear of pain, so, in our worldly life we can only minimise those pain or suffering but can’t vanish it altogether. Thus, it seems that the so-called observation of the concept of *Jīvanmukti* cannot be accepted. The main slogan of *Cārvāka* materialism is follows—

“*yāvajjīvētsukhaṃjīvedrṇamkṛtvāghṛtampivet
Bhasmībhūtasya dehasyapunarāgamanaṃ kutaḥ*”.⁶

‘While life remains, that a man live happily let him feed on ghee even though he runs into debt; when once the body becomes ashes how can it ever return again?’

In the above *Śloka*(verse), the second half directly refers to the denial of eternal soul or rebirth but the first half refers to the main dictum of human life suggested by *Cārvāka*, that we should live joyously. That is why *Cārvāka* view is known as *Sukhavāda* (hedonism). Here I think a number of objections may be raised against this *Cārvāka* principle of ‘... *rṇamkṛtvāghṛtampived*’. One may argue that so far as the ethical constitution of the *Cārvāka School* is concerned there is only the rule of taking debt but there is no rule of repaying the same. The concept of repaying the debt goes against their principle. If someone repay the debt taken by him then he has to repay the same with interest which positively leads to the unhappiness. But the ultimate goal of human life as taught by the *Cārvāka School* is the enjoyment of happiness. Now the question is – in this situation who will pay the debt? Obviously, none, because if someone pays the debt when surely, he will not get back the same that will make him unhappy. If no one pays the debt then there is no point of taking the same. Thus, it can be shown that the above slogan of *Cārvāka School* is futile.

No doubt the above objection is really well grounded and un-answerable. But I think this type of view is not the original view of the *Cārvāka School*. Even if this view is taken to be the view of this school, surely this view is opined

only the sub-section of this school called *DhūrtaCārvāka*, but not by the *Suśikṣita Cārvākas*.

The *Suśikṣita Cārvākas* somehow accept the significance of morality as a human conduct and believe that “the pleasure of the pig is certainly not the same as the pleasure of the philosopher”⁷. There is a qualitative difference between *Dhūrta* and *Suśikṣita Cārvākas*. That is why *Suśikṣita Cārvākas* may be called refined materialists. Without moral value human life can never be a human life rather it can be called animal life. Sensual pleasure is not true pleasure to human being.

Actually, *Suśikṣita Cārvākas* want to make an ideal society where a man can make his life beautiful through his own capability. What is important to note is that according to them, in order to make our life beautiful, invisible power (*aḍṛṣṭa*), sacrificial rite or worshipping God are not essential. We all are acquainted with a famous saying ‘self-help is the best help’. But believing in God makes one mentally weak and unfit for leading a good life and constructing an ideal society. On the otherhand, if those are done for the purpose of attainment of perfection, it cannot be acceptable to an enlightened person because our human life is very limited. So, we should not throw away our opportunities of enjoying this very life, in the uncertain hope of enjoyment hereafter. That is why for an enlightened person, it is better a pigeon today than a peacock tomorrow, a sure shell much more superior to an uncertain golden coin. Therefore, the aim of human being is to attain the maximum amount of happiness in this life and avoid suffering as far as possible. A good action always leads to a balance of pleasure over pain and bad action always brings more pain than pleasure.

Here an objection may be raised that if God is not recognised, then how can the existence of the world be explained? We all know that every event must have a cause, so there must be an efficient cause like God by whom the world has been created. This has been replied by *Cārvākas* following *Svabhāva-vāda*. According to this theory, all material elements of this world themselves have got its fixed nature (*Svabhāva*): for Example, in the case of a peacock, its looks so beautiful but its sound is unmelodious. Therefore, it is nothing but the natures and laws already inherent in the elements that give birth to this world without taking the help of any conscious agent like God.

Cārvākas argue if liberation means absolute destruction of all sufferings, it can be possible only by death. Our life is the combination of enjoyment and sufferings so it is not that due to the fear of suffering we have

to reject the pleasure. If we follow the principle of other schools then in that case we must reject grain because of its husk, never eating fish because it has bones, never grow crops because animal can destroy them, never making their food because it is possible that a beggar might ask them for a share. Therefore, *Cārvāka* Philosophy teaches us how a person can live properly in our society. Because we have already seen that all *Cārvākas* do not believe gross enjoyment as our ultimate goal. Those who believe in the same they are not compatible with social discipline or cultural society. As a social human being, life in a society is not possible if a person does not contribute or share his minimum pleasure for others.

The satisfaction of the sense enjoyment is also necessary for the existence of human body because non-satisfaction of the same might lead to diseases like *Unmāda* (insanity). But it is important to note that these sense enjoyments must be controlled and disciplined, being educated and cultured. Here *Vātsyāyana*, the author of '*Kāma-sūtra*', beautifully mentioned that our pleasure and enjoyment must be controlled by culture and discipline. That is why some *Cārvākas* regard the king as God. It implies that the king should properly maintain the society. Now the prominent question is that what would be the true characteristic of a king? Here if we go through *Kautilya's 'Arthaśāstra'*, at the very beginning of the same, he mentioned that *Arthaśāstra* is meant "for the acquisition and protection of the world (*prthivyālābhēpālana ca*), i. e. , it teaches the king how to acquire and protect a kingdom"⁸. He also talked about three *Vargas* such as *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma*, where all are mutually connected with each other, although he considers '*Artha*' as superior to others. He said that a king must follow the principal of *Lokāyata-śāstra*. Now the question is why did he think that this type of study is fit for the king? He said four types of *Vidyā* such as *Ānvīkṣikī*, *Trayī*, *Vārtā* and *Daṇḍanīti*. Here *Trayī* refers to *Ṛk*, *Sāma* and *Yajuh* the three *Vedas*, *Vārtā* means animal husbandry, agriculture and commerce or economics and *Daṇḍanīti* simply means the management of the state of politics. *Kautilya* mentioned that the vital and the superior one is *Ānvīkṣikī*, because according to him, *Ānvīkṣikī* is a lamp of all *Vidyās* (learning). The meaning of the same is generally known as '*Tarkavidyā*' or 'science of logic' but he mentioned *Sāmkhya*, *Yoga* along with *Lokāyata-śāstra* as *Ānvīkṣikī*. Here *Sāmkhya-Yoga* refers to Patañjali's *Yoga-sūtra* and *Lokāyata* refers to *Cārvāka*'s materialism. There are some controversies among the scholars about *Kautilya's* use of the term '*Lokāyata*'. "The two earlier commentaries, '*Jayamaṅgalā*' and '*Nītinirṇīti*', however, clearly identify *Lokāyata* with *Nāstika* Philosophy expounded by *Bṛhaspati*."⁶ Thus it is seen

that *Lokāyata* or *Cārvākas* clearly suggest that how can an ideal society be made.

Therefore, our life like a coin has two sides, one is pleasure and another is suffering. So, we should not waste our time. We should enjoy our life, but that enjoyment must be guided by and grounded upon culture and discipline, because these are the symbol of a true ideal man. The life of an ideal person would be successful only when he has a contribution to the society. Thus, we can say that it is the inner message of *Suśikṣita Cārvākas* which is highly significant in our present-day society.

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