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**Cārvāka Philosophy, the first philosophy of dissent.**

**A Research Paper for the course on Indian Philosophy for the Degree of M.A.  
in Philosophy**

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### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I am filled with a deep sense of gratitude to the Department of Philosophy, Loyola College, Chennai; for having inspired me to write this research paper. I am grateful to the almighty God for having given me the opportunity go through this stage of intellectual and philosophical formation.

This paper is a result of personal reflection on one of the Nāstika school of Indian Philosophy; i.e. the Cārvāka Philosophy, which I believe is the first philosophy of dissent. I was disturbed to read that the Cārvāka Philosophy was described only in one sentence in our syllabus, '*it was a materialistic philosophy which believed in eat, drink and be merry*'. I felt that there was much more to this school of thought and that a prejudice which was being paraded around as the truth. Hence, I began to research on the Cārvāka Philosophy, which took almost two years. I took on this study as a personal research as I found the topic to be fascinating and felt the urge to uncover the truth which was hidden/suppressed. I believe that the saddest part of our Indian education system is that it does not encourage independent thinking, imagination, doubting, questioning methodology but rather a crystallised form of indoctrination of theories and principles as recommended by the Board of Education. I am publishing this paper with a sole aim that students of philosophy and other fields will find my research helpful in their pursuit of knowledge.

The Cārvāka philosophical school questioned the existing religious and social structures and beliefs and propagated an attitude of questioning these existing hierarchical structures. Hence, it was silenced and the books and other documents were destroyed by the powers whose authority was questioned. This paper studies the Cārvāka philosophy from a philosophical perspective and not from political or any other perspective.

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## **Abstract**

In this paper I have tried to present the philosophy of the Cārvāka school of thought. I have covered their basic beliefs, Epistemology, Metaphysics and the way of life. I have also presented the contribution of the Cārvāka thought to the Indian society. Finally I have drawn parallels between the Eastern and Western thought processes and how the Cārvāka philosophy is actually the first philosophy which propagated freedom of thought and dissent by questioning the then prevalent social and religious structures.

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## Contents

Abstract .....	4
1. Introduction:.....	8
2. Cārvāka school of thought. ....	11
2.1. Cārvāka metaphysics.....	12
2.2 Self or soul in the Cārvāka view. ....	12
2.3. Denial of God or any transcendental being.....	15
2.4. Cārvāka Epistemology. ....	15
2.5. Knowledge in the Cārvāka view. ....	17
2.6 Illusion in the Cārvāka view.....	21
2.7 The way of life. ....	22
3. Status in Indian thought. ....	24
3.1 Science and heresy. ....	24
4. Ethics.....	27
4.1 Ontology of Charvaka .....	28
4.1.1. Originality and permanence of Matter.....	28
4.1.2. Acceptance of Yadrija-Vada over Causality. ....	28
4.1.3. Awareness as a material phenomenon.....	28
4.2. Ontology of Epicurean Philosophy. ....	29
4.2.1. Atomism .....	29
4.2.2. The concept of deviation .....	29
4.2.3. Rejection of resurrection and transmigration. ....	29
4.3. The difference between the Eastern and Western ontology. ....	29
5. Conclusion. ....	30
6. Bibliography .....	33

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## 1. Introduction:

The Indian philosophical systems can be broadly categorized into two groups: the heterodox (nāstika) and orthodox (āstika) schools. The heterodox systems, also known as nāstikas, are those that do not recognize the authority of the Veda. On the other hand, the orthodox systems, referred to as āstikas, acknowledge the validity of the Veda. Within the nāstika or heterodox category, we find the Cārvāka, Jainism, and Buddhism philosophies.

### 1. Heterodox (nāstika) Schools:

The heterodox schools are those philosophical systems that do not accept the validity and authority of the Veda. They present alternative views and perspectives on metaphysics, ethics, and the nature of reality. The three major heterodox schools are:

**a. Cārvāka (also known as Lokāyata):** The Cārvāka school is known for its materialistic and atheistic philosophy. It rejects the existence of gods, the concept of the soul, and the idea of an afterlife. It emphasizes the importance of perception and sensory experience as the only valid sources of knowledge.

**b. Jainism:** Jainism is an ancient Indian religion and philosophical system that advocates non-violence, truthfulness, and non-possession as the fundamental principles of ethical conduct. Jains believe in the existence of eternal souls and emphasize the importance of spiritual liberation through self-discipline and renunciation.

**c. Buddhism:** Buddhism originated in India and has spread to various parts of the world. It was founded by Siddhartha Gautama, also known as the Buddha. Buddhism rejects the authority of the Veda and emphasizes the cessation of suffering through the practice of the Eightfold Path. It teaches the impermanence of all phenomena and the concept of non-self.

### 2. Orthodox (āstika) Schools:

The orthodox schools are those philosophical systems that recognize and accept the authority of the Veda. They are closely associated with Hinduism and share common foundational beliefs. The six major orthodox schools are:

**a. Nyāya:** The Nyāya school focuses on logical reasoning and analysis as a means to gain knowledge. It explores topics such as perception, inference, and testimony.

**b. Vaiśeṣika:** The Vaiśeṣika school delves into metaphysics and explores the nature of reality, atoms, and categories of existence.

**c. Sāṅkhya:** The Sāṅkhya school presents a dualistic philosophy, distinguishing between the eternal Purusha (consciousness) and Prakriti (matter). It explores the nature of the self and the process of liberation.

**d. Yoga:** The Yoga school focuses on meditation, ethical disciplines, and spiritual practices to achieve self-realization and union with the divine.

**e. Mīmāṃsā:** The Mīmāṃsā school emphasizes the interpretation and ritualistic aspects of the Veda, exploring ethical duties and the nature of knowledge.

**f. Vedānta:** Vedānta encompasses various sub-schools, including Advaita Vedānta, Dvaita Vedānta, and Vishishtadvaita Vedānta. It delves into the nature of reality, consciousness, and the relationship between the individual soul (Atman) and the universal soul (Brahman).

These diverse philosophical schools have contributed to the rich tapestry of Indian thought, offering different perspectives on existence, knowledge, ethics, and the ultimate purpose of life. In this paper I shall deal with the often misunderstood and ignored school of Indian philosophy, the Cārvāka school.

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## 2. Cārvāka school of thought.

The initial school of thought we examine is Indian materialism, also known as Cārvāka darśana. It stands as one of the oldest non-Vedic schools in India. Br̥haspati is recognized as the teacher associated with Cārvāka, although the true meaning behind the name 'Cārvāka' remains unclear. Some scholars suggest that Cārvāka was the disciple to whom the founder first communicated the doctrine. However, the term 'Cārvāka' itself translates to 'sweet-tongued' (cāru-vāka), which signifies a doctrine that superficially advocates the pursuit of pleasure (kāma) and wealth (artha). Unfortunately, the original works of the Cārvāka school have been lost, and knowledge about this system has been derived from works by Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists.

The viewpoint of Cārvāka reveals that in India, spiritualism was not the sole focus, as materialism held significant influence. The concept of matter as the ultimate reality was initially conceived by Br̥haspati Laukya of the Rig Veda. However, in its early stages, Indian materialism was intertwined with skepticism and agnosticism, and Br̥haspati provided it with a distinct form.

During its initial phase, Cārvāka adhered to the principle of 'svabhāva vāda,' which attributed an object's general characteristics to itself rather than an external agent. It rejected the notion that nature reveals any divine or transcendent power operating within it. For instance, fire is hot, water is cold, and air has a moderate temperature when touched. According to Cārvāka, these qualities are inherent to each object. In essence, things are what they are, and their nature alone accounts for the universe's diversity and the order evident within it.

The Cārvākas do not believe in the existence of a constant cause-effect relationship. They argue that observing two phenomena together does not necessarily imply that one is the cause of the other. Merely because we observe fire and smoke simultaneously, can we conclude that fire is the cause of smoke? Can we claim that if there is smoke, fire is an inevitable outcome, both in the past before my birth and in the future after my death? However, information about this school is scarce, and our understanding primarily stems from criticisms raised by its adversaries. While the Sarva darśana samgraha briefly covers this system, the available information adds little to what can be gleaned from other sources.

Cārvāka is also referred to as Lokāyāta, indicating that the system is limited to the realm of common sense. Given that most schools of Indian philosophy mainly criticize Cārvāka's materialistic principles, one might consider the possibility that these schools tend to exaggerate its weaknesses and/or misinterpret its doctrines.

## 2.1. Cārvāka metaphysics.

With a positivistic approach, Cārvāka asserts that perception or *pratyaksa* serves as the sole valid means of knowledge. Consequently, Cārvāka considers only that which is perceptible as the subject of knowledge. Anything beyond perceptibility is dismissed as a product of our imagination. Based on this standpoint, matter alone constitutes the true reality, and the world is composed of four fundamental categories: earth, water, fire, and air. These categories are purely physical and can be directly perceived. However, Cārvāka does not accept ether or space as the fifth element since it lacks perceptibility.

According to Cārvāka, matter serves as both the material cause and the efficient cause of the universe. They contend that matter has always existed and will continue to exist. All living and non-living entities are the outcomes of these elemental principles of matter. The belief that matter represents the ultimate reality is inferred from Brhaspati's statement, 'out of matter come forth life.' (IGNOU, 2023)

## 2.2 Self or soul in the Cārvāka view.

The central doctrine of the Cārvāka system revolves around the belief that perception (*pratyaksha*) serves as the sole valid means of knowledge. As there is no entity separate from the body called the 'soul,' which is evident in perception, the Cārvāka system does not recognize the existence of such an entity. According to Cārvāka, when the four elemental forms of matter - earth, water, fire, and air - combine in a specific manner, they give rise to what we refer to as a body. Life breath (*prāna*) and consciousness exist solely within this body. The body itself is considered the soul, and apart from the body, there is nothing permanent or eternal. In the disjoined state of the minute particles (*kana*) of matter, which constitute the basic building blocks of matter, there is no presence of life breath or consciousness. They remain lifeless and devoid of sensation during that time. However, through the unique combination or mixture of these elements, life breath and consciousness emerge. Therefore, what is commonly referred to as the soul is essentially the conscious body. In other words, consciousness or mind is an epiphenomenon, a byproduct of matter. Such a byproduct is possible because qualities that are not individually possessed by the elements can arise when they are combined. For instance, the

intoxicating quality arises from the combination of yeast and other ingredients, even though this quality is not inherent in the individual ingredients themselves.

As mentioned in the *sarvasiddhāntasārasamgraha*, ‘That intelligence which is found to be embodied in modified forms of the non-intelligent elements is produced in the same way in which the red color is produced from the combination of betel, areca-nut, and lime.’ Thought is regarded as a function of matter. Since consciousness is a property of the body, when the body disintegrates, consciousness disappears, and each constituent element reunites with its own kind, leaving behind only ashes and dust. Concepts such as transmigration and retribution hold no meaning within this framework.

Cārvāka further supports the aforementioned notion through the following analysis. They argue that both common usage and scriptures reveal the self as an awareness involving the concept of ‘I’ as the doer (karta), experiencer (bhokta), or observer (drashta). Typically, in an awareness that includes the ‘I,’ it is the body itself that is recognized as the doer, experiencer, and observer. According to Cārvāka, the body is the atman (self), characterized by attributes indicated by statements such as ‘I am stout,’ ‘I am young,’ ‘I am an adult,’ and so on. Our experience does not provide evidence of the separate existence of the body and soul. For instance, when we say ‘I am writing,’ the self is perceived as the doer, while if someone is writing while sitting in their house, the self is revealed as being inside the house. In this context, the ‘self in the house’ is nothing but the body. Similarly, in a statement like ‘I see the moon while sitting inside my room,’ the ‘I’ is recognized as the observer and as someone in the room. Once again, this ‘I’ is simply the body, which is perceived as the observer and as being in the room. In another scenario, when someone says, ‘I fell in the pit and suffered much pain,’ the ‘I’ is seen as the experiencer, and the ‘I’ that fell is none other than the body. Therefore, according to the Cārvākas, only the body represents the self. By scrutinizing various instances of awareness involving the concept of ‘I,’ the Cārvākas conclude that the body alone is considered the self.

Later followers of the Cārvāka system put forth three additional views to explain the cause of consciousness. According to some thinkers, consciousness is only possible due to the senses. Another view attributes agency to the vital power or prana, which is life itself. The third view posits that the mind (manas) is the agent of knowledge. Although life and mind were considered distinct from the body, their separate existence was not acknowledged.

The Cārvāka perspective, asserting that there is no self separate from the body, naturally sparked intense controversy. The concept of Ātman holds a significant position in other philosophical systems, and thus, all these systems opposed the Cārvāka viewpoint. Several compelling arguments were presented against the Cārvāka school. Firstly, opponents of Cārvāka argue that if consciousness is a property of the body, it should either be an essential or an accidental property. If it were an essential property, it would be inseparable from the body, meaning consciousness would persist as long as the body exists. However, this contradicts our observations of phenomena such as fainting and dreamless sleep, where consciousness temporarily ceases. On the other hand, if consciousness is considered an accidental property of the body, it necessitates an agent (upādhi) to generate consciousness.

If we cannot ascribe consciousness solely to the body, then it leads us to consider alternative explanations. For instance, when someone wakes up after a dream, they can acknowledge their dream experience. However, if they saw themselves as a tiger in the dream, they would disassociate themselves from the dream body. Scholars argue that even if we accept that consciousness is always linked to a physical body, it is not logical to claim that consciousness ceases to exist when the organism perishes. They suggest that consciousness may continue in some other manner, although this cannot be proven. Nonetheless, the presence of doubt is sufficient to challenge the Cārvāka standpoint.

Moreover, while consciousness is consistently associated with the body, it does not imply that one is a property of the other. For example, the eye cannot perceive in absolute darkness. However, does this mean that visual perception is a property of light? Similarly, we can understand that the body acts as a condition for consciousness to manifest itself.

The most significant counter-argument against the Cārvāka view is whether we can directly perceive the dreams, feelings, thoughts, pain, pleasure, and other internal experiences of others as we can perceive their physical body. A person's dreams and feelings are immediately known to that person alone, while others can only perceive their body without having access to their internal experiences. The physical appearance or complexion of the body is observable to anyone who interacts with the person. To illustrate further, the sensation of a toothache experienced by a patient is not identical to the knowledge possessed by their dentist. Opponents of the Cārvāka system contend that these facts demonstrate that consciousness is not a property

of the physical body but of something else, or it represents an independent principle that finds expression through the body.

### **2.3. Denial of God or any transcendental being.**

As previously mentioned, the Cārvāka system adheres solely to what is validated through perception or *pratyaksha*, leaving no room for anything transcendental. It rejects the existence of a God who governs the universe or a conscience that guides human beings. Unlike other Indian philosophical systems that emphasize ethics and belief in an afterlife, Cārvāka dismisses the notion of life-after-death, which suggests that virtuous conduct is rewarded and wrongdoing is punished. Instead, Cārvāka advocates that human beings are here to indulge in sensual pleasure. They argue that nature is indifferent to moral distinctions; the sun shines equally on the virtuous and the wicked. According to Cārvāka, the majority of people believe in deities due to their own vulnerability. There is no heaven or hell; there is only this world in which we live.

The Cārvāka system does not believe in a creator God. If there were an omniscient, omnipotent, and compassionate God, why does this God not eliminate all doubts regarding their existence from every individual? God cannot be considered the judge of our merits and demerits, for if we perceive God as a judge, it would imply partiality and cruelty. Therefore, Cārvāka argues that it is preferable not to have a god rather than to have a cruel one. According to Cārvāka, there is no supreme author or ruler of this world; the only god is the earthly king, the ruler of a state who serves as the arbiter of right and wrong in society.

### **2.4. Cārvāka Epistemology.**

According to the Cārvāka school, knowledge is situated within the body. They support this claim through the principle of ‘presence in presence and absence in absence.’ For instance, the color of a flower is only perceptible when the flower itself is present; otherwise, the color is not observed. In other words, the color of the flower is located within the flower, and when the flower is absent, the color is also absent. This exemplifies the principle of conformity to presence and absence.

Similarly, a correspondence can be observed between the body and knowledge, where there is agreement in terms of presence and absence. It is undeniable that when the body,

specifically the sense organ, is present, knowledge is also present. Conversely, when the sense organ is absent, knowledge is also absent. For instance, when the visual sense organ is intact, the ability to see exists, whereas in the case of blindness, the ability to see is non-existent. This agreement in presence and absence between the sense organ and knowledge demonstrates that all knowledge is located exclusively within the sense organ. It is important to clarify that the Cārvāka school does not consider ‘presence in presence and absence in absence’ as an argument. As they do not accept the validity of inference, the Cārvāka School establishes this principle solely through perception.

The concept of ‘consciousness of matter’ (bhūta-caitanya-vāda) is synonymous with the ‘consciousness of sense organs’ (indria-caitanya-vāda) in the Cārvāka system. According to Cārvāka, sense organs are acknowledged to be composed of the elemental forms of matter, such as earth, fire, water, and air. An objection raised against the doctrine of consciousness of matter is as follows: opponents argue that in old age, we often recollect events from childhood. This phenomenon cannot be explained if we accept the doctrine of consciousness of matter. Recollection is considered the effect of earlier impressions stored in consciousness. However, according to the bhūta-caitanya-vāda, impressions can only be located in the sense organs, and due to the dissolution of the atoms of matter, the sense organs of childhood no longer exist in old age. Therefore, the impressions that were located in the sense organs must have been destroyed.

Nevertheless, this objection can be addressed from the Cārvāka perspective. Firstly, it should be noted that Cārvāka does not believe in the concept of causality. Therefore, their response to such an objection would be to assert that only that which has been directly perceived through sense perception can be acknowledged. According to the Cārvāka view, an impression is not the cause of recollection. Recollection pertains to a previously perceived object. Hence, nothing unknown is presented in the process of recollection. The Cārvāka system argues that due to the unique nature of existence, different things with distinct forms emerge in various locations and at different times. No additional cause needs to be postulated to explain this phenomenon.

## 2.5. Knowledge in the Cārvāka view.

In the Cārvāka perspective, knowledge is generally classified into two categories: apprehension (anubhava) and recollection (smaraṇa). Apprehension is further divided into two subcategories: perception and assumption (kalpanā). Perception refers to knowledge acquired through the five senses: sight, taste, smell, touch, and sound. Each sense organ provides knowledge pertaining to specific attributes such as color, taste, smell, touch, and sound. Valid knowledge, known as pramāna, refers to knowledge of objects that is not contradicted by subsequent knowledge. According to Cārvāka, sense organs serve as the means for valid knowledge. Thus, in the Cārvāka view, all other forms of knowledge, such as inferential knowledge and verbal testimony, are considered invalid. Since all forms of knowledge, except perception, are deemed invalid, they are classified as assumptions. Cārvāka presents various arguments to support the claim that both inference and verbal knowledge are invalid.

Inference involves making a claim about the truth or falsehood of one proposition based on other propositions. It can take the form of deductive reasoning or inductive reasoning. However, the Cārvāka school rejects inference itself and does not make a distinction between deductive and inductive reasoning. From the perspective of knowledge, the Cārvāka system regards the patterns of deductive and inductive inference as closely interconnected. The Cārvāka school argues that the deductive pattern, for example:

*‘All men are mortal.’*

*‘Socrates is a man.’*

*‘Therefore, Socrates is mortal.’*

The acceptance of the deductive pattern presented earlier, which states, ‘All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore, Socrates is mortal,’ cannot be justified. Without knowing the truth of the propositions ‘All men are mortal’ and ‘Socrates is a man,’ we cannot assert that Socrates is mortal. Now, let us examine the inductive pattern of inference to determine the validity of the universal proposition ‘All men are mortal.’ Induction involves justifying a universal proposition based on particular propositions. By observing that particular men, denoted as x, y, z, are mortal, we may conclude that all men are mortal. However, according to the Cārvāka system, this is an unjustified leap. The universal proposition lacks justification as we can only assert that, thus far, all observed men have been mortal. Drawing a universal conclusion assumes that the future will resemble the past. Yet, our experience does not provide sufficient

grounds to warrant such a conclusion. Consequently, the inferred proposition ‘All men are mortal’ lacks reliability as knowledge. If this proposition itself is unreliable, there is no basis for any deductive inference.

Furthermore, the Cārvāka system criticizes deductive inference for committing the fallacy of ‘petitio principii,’ which involves arguing in a circle or begging the question. Thus, asserting that all men are mortal simultaneously assumes that Socrates is mortal, as Socrates falls under the classification of being a man. Consequently, the statement ‘Socrates is mortal’ does not provide any new knowledge or information that is not already contained within the original proposition.

The general objection to the aforementioned criticism of the Cārvāka school is that the statement ‘All men are mortal’ can be ascertained due to the perceived invariable concomitance between man and mortality. Similarly, one can assert, ‘Wherever there is smoke, there is fire,’ based on the observed invariable connection (vyāpti) between smoke and fire. However, the Cārvāka system does not accept claims regarding invariable concomitance; as such claims extend beyond what is perceived and perceivable. According to the Cārvāka view, universal truths cannot be asserted because they lack a foundation in our perceptual experience. We have no experiential grounds to transition from statements about limited perceived instances to unlimited and unrestricted universal generalizations.

Considering the Cārvāka perspective on inference, it becomes apparent that it is not feasible to completely avoid the use of reason or inference. For instance, in order to communicate their doctrine, a materialist must employ language. Language involves producing certain sounds (through words), and the listener infers the meaning and content of what the materialist is expressing based on those sounds. This inference is possible because the listener relies on their memory for the meaning of words. Thus, although the Cārvāka school denies the role of inference at the theoretical level, practitioners of the system themselves inevitably employ inference in their everyday lives, especially when interacting with others.

Furthermore, the Cārvāka system generalizes that perception is reliable based on the observation that most instances of perception are trustworthy. However, even if we grant that perception is a reliable source of knowledge, we must question why perception alone should be deemed as the sole reliable source. A significant criticism of the Cārvāka view arises from Sāmkhya thinkers who raise the question: How can someone who rejects inference determine

whether a person is ignorant, doubtful, or mistaken? Perception alone cannot unveil the ignorance, doubt, or errors of others. This understanding must be inferred from their behavior or speech.

Now, let us shift our focus to the Cārvāka critique of testimony. According to the Cārvāka perspective, testimony is considered reliable only when we assume that the individuals providing the information are honest and trustworthy. However, on what basis can we determine that someone will always remain honest and trustworthy? One who has been honest in the past may not necessarily continue to be so in the future. Therefore, according to the Cārvāka system, verbal testimony cannot be considered reliable and cannot serve as a source of valid knowledge. Consequently, from the Cārvāka standpoint, verbal knowledge is also categorized as an assumption, as we can rely on it only after it is verified through perception.

Regarding testimony, it is crucial to note that the Cārvāka school strongly aimed to discredit the validity of Vedic statements. They vehemently denounced the authority of the Vedas, using harsh language to describe their faults. According to the Cārvāka perspective, Vedic statements are tainted by three fundamental flaws: untruth, self-contradiction, and tautology. They argue that many sacrifices advocated in the Vedas were solely for the livelihood of the Brahmins and lacked any inherent validity or truth. For instance, the Vedas claim that performing the asvamedha sacrifice is necessary for attaining heaven. However, as no one can ascertain the existence of a world after death, and since heaven cannot be attained while one is alive, there is no way to verify whether anyone has ever attained heaven.

Another example highlighted by the Cārvāka school pertains to the statement that performing a specific yagna or sacrifice called putreshti will grant a child to a childless couple. The Cārvāka argues that this claim cannot be proven true. Although in some cases, a child may be born after the performance of the sacrifice, such a result could be attributed to factors other than the yagna itself. Not everyone who performs the yagna will necessarily conceive a child. Thus, the Cārvāka regards these statements as traditional hearsay (aitihya), lacking the status of a valid source of knowledge. The validity of a statement depends on the perception of the objects referred to by it. As the objects described by the Vedas are entirely imperceptible, their validity, particularly when discussing extraordinary matters, becomes implausible. The Cārvāka school emphasizes that there is no statement that can be considered intrinsically valid or possess *svatahprāmānya*.

After presenting their arguments against the invalidity of inference and verbal testimony, Cārvāka thinkers proceed to criticize other sources of knowledge accepted by Mimamsa. They contend that knowledge gained through postulation is essentially an assumption. Postulation is resorted to when one recognizes that a particular accepted meaning cannot be justified by any other means. Even the knower is aware that their knowledge is a form of assumption, taking the shape of ‘presuming such a meaning.’

According to the Mimāmsaka school, when performing sacrifices like Asvamedha, a kind of unseen result or merit (adrsta) is obtained by the person performing it. This merit is established through postulation. In other words, although the sacrificial act (kriya) is temporary, the merit generated by it supposedly endures until one reaches heaven. Cārvāka questions the validity of this knowledge obtained through postulation, asserting that it amounts to nothing more than traditional hearsay, essentially an assumption.

Regarding non-existence or abhava, knowledge of it is acquired through the pramana (means of knowledge) called non-apprehension or anupalabdhi. In the Cārvāka view, non-existences are deemed entirely unreal. Therefore, within this perspective, knowledge of non-existence would also be categorized as assumption. Consequently, Cārvāka rejects inference, comparison, verbal testimony, postulation, and non-apprehension as valid sources of knowledge. According to the Cārvāka school, the only reliable source of valid knowledge is perceptual knowledge that is not contradicted.

According to the Cārvāka school of thought, the mind is considered one of the five sense organs. Unlike Nyaya-Vaisesika, which regards the mind as a separate sense organ for experiencing pleasure and pain, Cārvāka rejects the existence of a distinct sense organ called ‘mind.’ Thus, strictly speaking, there is no mental perception. Instead, Cārvāka explains the experience of feelings in the following manner:

The sense organ known as the skin (tvac) is uniformly present both outside and inside the body. Cārvāka posits that the portion of the sense organ situated inside the body is the internal sense organ or what is commonly referred to as the mind. According to their view, people experience pleasure and pain with the assistance of this sense organ. In many cases, pleasure or pain arises due to the experience of a specific type of touch, with the inside skin serving as the underlying substrate. In other words, pleasure is a form of tactile experience, while pain is also a

type of tactile experience that results in a certain kind of knowledge. Similarly, desire and aversion can be understood as forms of knowledge.

When we recognize that something serves as a means to fulfill our desires, we experience the fulfillment of our desires. In other words, the desired outcome is achieved through the desired means (ishta-sadhana). Conversely, when we know that something is harmful, we develop a feeling of aversion. The underlying foundation for all these experiences is still the sense organ itself. According to this perspective, recollection is also a result of the sense organ's functioning. Recollection always has a known object as its focus. Through different types of physical stimulation, individuals recall previously experienced events. However, there is no universal rule that associates a specific type of stimulation with the recollection of a particular object. The relationship between the modification of the sense organ and the act of recollection lacks a cause-and-effect connection. Each individual is prompted to recollect a specific experience based on various factors, and thus no general cause-and-effect relationship can be established solely through the modification of the sense organ.

## **2.6 Illusion in the Cārvāka view.**

Cārvāka provides an explanation for illusory knowledge by endorsing the theory of *asatkhyāti*, which refers to the awareness of the non-existent. When a shell is mistakenly perceived as silver, an illusion occurs. Due to poor lighting conditions or distance, the non-existent silver is perceived, resulting in the revelation of something that is actually non-existent and unreal. However, in other cases of illusion, what is revealed is not unreal.

For instance, when a person is traveling in a fast-moving train and sees the lamp posts and trees on the sides appearing to move at the same speed, it is the relationship between the objects that is illusory, not the objects themselves. In this scenario, the perceived speed is associated with the objects, which are real but stationary. Therefore, it is only the relationship between the objects and the perceived speed that is incorrectly perceived in this case.

## 2.7 The way of life.

Cārvāka rejects spiritual values and dismisses the concepts of ‘Dharma’ and ‘Moksha’, two of the four purusārthas or human values. Their philosophy focuses solely on the pursuit of sensual pleasure (kāma) and wealth (artha) as the means to attain pleasure. In essence, it promotes crude Hedonism. Cārvāka acknowledges that pleasure is often accompanied by pain. However, they argue that one does not discard grain due to its husk, stop plucking a lotus due to its thorns, or cease eating fish because of its bones and scales. Similarly, the departure of a beloved spouse or child may bring sorrow, but a life devoid of love is also miserable and barren.

Cārvāka recognizes that sorrow exists everywhere, from the palaces of kings to the huts of beggars. Yet, they assert that our world is not entirely filled with misery. The amount of pleasure outweighs the pain, as evidenced by people's desire to live and their fear of death. The key, according to Cārvāka, is to embrace pleasure and avoid pain, which is inevitably intertwined with it. They advocate for maximizing one's personal pleasure in life. This philosophy encourages individuals to make the best of their circumstances and to indulge in enjoyment.

At times, one may question whether a system exists that promotes self-centeredness without any contribution to the society in which one lives. While it is conceivable to imagine a system without the ideal of ‘Moksha’ envisioning a system devoid of ‘Dharma’ proves to be much more challenging.

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### **3. Status in Indian thought.**

The significance of Lokāyata within the Indian Philosophical community is a relevant topic that sheds light on its philosophical implications. Interestingly, the etymology of the term Lokāyata itself reflects the historical marginalization of Indian Materialism. Due to its association with hedonistic behavior and heretical religious views, followers of spiritualistic schools like Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism often remain hesitant to acknowledge the materialistic tendencies present within their own systems. Nevertheless, scholars such as Daya Krishna have proposed that varying degrees of materialism can be found across all Indian philosophical schools. This does not imply that materialism replaces other ideologies, but rather suggests that notions emphasizing the significance of worldly matters emerge even within spiritualistic schools.

While matter does not universally take precedence over the spiritual realm in all aspects, its importance is relatively elevated compared to other major world religions. While some may argue that this observation holds little weight when examining the philosophical import of various Indian schools of thought, it becomes relevant when considering the evolution of Indian intellectual discourse. The original meaning of Lokāyata as prevalent among the people has indeed become true in the sense that its influence pervades Indian philosophical thought at large. This does not imply widespread acceptance of materialism or overt acknowledgment of its presence, but it is challenging to disregard its far-reaching influence on Indian Philosophy as a whole.

#### **3.1 Science and heresy.**

The impact of Materialism on Indian thought is particularly evident in the realm of science. The propagation of Indian Materialism fostered a mindset that recognized the inherent value of matter itself. Contrary to considering the body as a burden on the mind or soul, the Materialist perspective emphasized the wonder and potential of the physical body. This shift in perspective is reflected in the advancement of science throughout India's history. Materialist thought elevated the physical world and bestowed respect upon the sciences. Furthermore, the Materialist emphasis on empirical validation of truth became a fundamental principle of the Scientific Method. It is noteworthy that Indian Materialism predates the British Empiricist movement by more than a millennium. While empirical evidence held little authority in Ancient

India, modern thought began to appreciate the systematic and cautious epistemology that initially emerged in the teachings of the Lokāyata.

Despite its significant influence on Indian thought, Indian Materialism is often perceived as a direct challenge to the beliefs of the Spiritualistic schools. It rejects the theistic principles of Hinduism and the moral teachings of Buddhism and Jainism. The Materialists' unconventional views are considered heretical by the religious masses and contradict the piety advocated by most religious sects. However, it is debatable whether those who claim allegiance to Materialism genuinely adhere to its ethical principles in their entirety. Many scholars suspect that contemporary Indian Materialism aligns with atheistic perspectives that prioritize science over supernatural beliefs. Throughout history, Materialists have expressed views that have not garnered favor from established religious and social authorities. It was this struggle with religious authorities of their times which brought down the Cārvāka philosophy.

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#### 4. Ethics.

The prevailing perspective among scholars is that Indian Materialism primarily espouses Egoism as its ethical stance. This means that it prioritizes an individual's own interests over the interests of others. Materialists critique other ethical systems that are based on duty or virtue derived from false, supernatural cosmologies. According to Indian Materialism, pleasure in and of itself is the sole intrinsic good, promoting hedonistic practices. Moreover, it rejects a utilitarian approach to pleasure that aims to maximize the collective good. Instead, it firmly adheres to egoistic principles, suggesting that individuals have no obligation to promote the welfare of society unless it ultimately benefits them as well.

It is worth noting that the Cārvāka school has faced criticism from various schools of Indian philosophy, not only for its rejection of the supernatural but also for its steadfast rejection of any ethical framework beyond Egoism. Some scholars argue that Indian Materialism is purely nihilistic, implying that Egoistic or Hedonistic ethics are not even fundamental elements of the system but rather accurate descriptions of the values and practices upheld by the Cārvāka people. This perspective contends that the Cārvāka's axiology was purely negative, denying both the concept of 'The Good' as understood in a Platonic sense and any notions of 'god' or 'gods.'

The term 'nāstika' is commonly used across various schools of Indian Philosophy as a derogatory label to refer to a different school of thought that is deemed to have deviated significantly from what is considered acceptable in terms of religious beliefs and ethical values. The Cārvāka school is the primary target of this term, often degraded to the same extent. 'Cārvāka' and 'nāstika' are sometimes used interchangeably to describe a mode of thinking that diverges from the classical schools of Indian thought.

Being labeled as a 'nāstika' carries the implication that the recipient has strayed dangerously from the path towards enlightenment. In Indian culture, ethical practices and spiritual education are intricately intertwined. Those who align with the Indian Materialist school face criticism from prominent philosophical schools because they are perceived as lacking knowledge in both metaphysical and moral aspects. This ignorance is seen not as a grave threat to society at large but as a deficiency for the individual who lacks spiritual and moral understanding.

The concern shown by Indian Philosophy for the individual beliefs and practices of its members stands in stark contrast to the cultural and individual relativism that is largely embraced

in the Western context (Turner & Wernicki, 2022). I shall now elucidate the difference between the Eastern and Western materialisms' represented by Cārvāka and Epicurean philosophies respectively.

## **4.1 Ontology of Charvaka**

### **4.1.1. Originality and permanence of Matter**

According to the philosophy of Charvaka, the world and its creatures are constructed through various combinations of four fundamental elements: water, fire, earth, and wind. Charvaka proponents assert that while all beings are transient and impermanent, these four elements themselves are enduring. When questioned about the basis for their belief in these elements as the fundamental constituents of the universe, they would rely solely on the testimony of the senses, which they consider to be the sole reliable source of knowledge.

### **4.1.2. Acceptance of Yadrija-Vada over Causality.**

The Charvaka School rejects the notion of causality and its associated concepts, contending instead that all events in the universe are determined by chance (Yadrija-Vada). They do not believe in the existence of a wise God or powerful deities beyond the world who serve as normative causes. According to the Charvaka perspective, all phenomena originate exclusively in nature and occur due to accidental circumstances.

### **4.1.3. Awareness as a material phenomenon.**

Another fundamental principle of Charvaka ontology is the rejection of the concept of a 'soul without body' and the acceptance of awareness as a secondary material attribute. According to this viewpoint, even consciousness is derived from the four material elements. When these elements combine to form a living being, awareness emerges as a secondary quality. However, when the four elements separate from each other, awareness is suppressed. These radical ideas about consciousness lead Charvaka philosophers to deny the existence of a soul separate from the body and to disapprove of the concept of transmigration.

## **4.2. Ontology of Epicurean Philosophy.**

### **4.2.1. Atomism**

The concept of atomism, a materialistic theory, posits that all beings originate from and are composed of atoms. Atoms are indivisible, solid particles that exist in vast quantities, and different types of atoms give rise to diverse beings and worlds. According to Epicurus, even gods are comprised of atoms and reside in the spaces between worlds.

### **4.2.2. The concept of deviation**

Epicurus proposes that atoms primarily move rapidly from high to low positions. During these movements, atoms occasionally deviate from their intended path and come into contact with one another. Due to their solidity, atoms collide and accumulate, resulting in the formation of various beings.

### **4.2.3. Rejection of resurrection and transmigration.**

Epicurus firmly refutes the notion that a deceased body can experience death. Furthermore, he argues that eschatological beliefs give rise to fear, anxiety, and legends that promise torment in the afterlife. The ideas surrounding an afterlife or the existence of a spirit without a body are filled with numerous uncertainties. For instance, if the soul or spirit is separated from the body, does it possess awareness and senses? If not, then the soul cannot experience the afterlife, whether it is fearful or pleasurable. Consequently, eschatological concepts like transmigration are deemed invalid.

## **4.3. The difference between the Eastern and Western ontology.**

Materialism is a prevalent ideology across different cultures. Epicureanism and Charvaka represent two significant forms of materialism in Greece and India, respectively. Although Epicureanism presents a more coherent and rational philosophical system both Epicureans and Charvaka philosophers criticize the idea of divine intervention in the world. However, in contrast to Charvaka, Epicureans accept the existence of gods and spirits as atomic and material beings. The Charvaka School posits that awareness is a secondary quality without independent existence, while Epicureans believe that awareness exists independently and is composed of atoms. While Epicurus explains cosmogony through the ‘idea of deviation,’ Charvaka interprets it through ‘Yadrija-Vada’ or the concept of ‘Accidence.’ (Dehghanzadeh & Ahmadian, 2019)

## 5. Conclusion.

Lokāyāta, often referred to as the philosophy of the marginalized, emerged as a counter to the prevailing hegemonic structures. Its proponents sought to challenge the dominant ideologies that excluded ethnic and economic minorities from mainstream discourse. Notably, the Adivāsi community represented the ethnic minority, while the working class stood as the embodiment of the economic minority (Bin Kamal, 2020). Through the lens of Lokāyāta philosophy, these marginalized groups positioned themselves as an ‘alternative’ or ‘other’ in opposition to the prevailing hegemony and its associated institutions. This stance created a sense of conflict between the minorities and the state apparatus, which primarily served the interests of the dominant stakeholders. One of the key distinctions brought forth by Lokāyāta was the contrast between the metaphysical beliefs held by Adivāsis and other marginalized communities and the transcendental concepts propagated by Hinduism, the predominant religion in India. This philosophical stance highlighted the marginal others and their differing perspectives in contrast to the prevailing political ethics of the modern state.

Based on the previous discussion, we can deduce that the essence of the Lokāyāta debate underlies the movements advocating for the rights of Dalits and tribal communities, even though the term itself may not be explicitly referenced within these movements. The crux of this debate revolves around the conflicting ideologies of transcendence and hegemony against the rights and autonomy of indigenous communities and the working class. Essentially, it is a clash between the politically and economically dominant classes and the working proletariat.

Although the ancient Lokāyāta or Cārvāka thinkers and teachers are no longer present, their ideas and principles continue to persist. This is because these ideologies originated and spread among the grassroots people of India, and the ongoing caste-class struggle is inherently tied to the struggles faced by the grassroots population. The nature of political hegemony may have evolved from the historical Brahminic and caste-based hegemony to one influenced by constitutional secularism, but the concept of hegemony itself endures. Similarly, the class struggle and the process of mutual negotiation and adaptation among different social groups remain prevalent. The spirit of the Lokāyāta debate is indirectly present in the Dalit and tribal rights movements, and the ongoing struggle for social justice continues to be shaped by the ideologies that emerged from the grassroots levels of Indian society. While the political

landscape may have shifted, the fundamental issues of hegemony, class struggle, and adaptation persist.

In conclusion, Lokāyāta philosophy provided a platform for ethnic and economic minorities, such as the Adivāsis, the Dalits and the working class, to challenge the dominant hegemony and its associated institutions. It also emphasized the differences between the metaphysical concepts of the marginalized and the transcendental ideas propagated by the dominant religion.

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