

## The View of Consciousness in the Heterodox (Nāstika) School

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explain the view of heterodox (nāstika) school on consciousness. The research question is why the Cārvākas' approach is distinguished from the Jainas and the Buddha's ways to the highest goal of life. It is because the Cārvākas do not believe in the law of Karma whereas the other schools accept the law of Karma. For the Cārvākas, thus, enjoyment is the ultimate end of human soul or consciousness; the maximum amount of pleasure in this life is their ideal. The goal of life, for the Jainas and the Buddha, is free from evils, miseries and bondage. In this paper, the descriptive and evaluative methods are used. The contribution of this paper is to share knowledge that even in a group of people with the same principles, the opinions of its members can be different.

Key words: Nāstika School, Consciousness, Goal of life, and Law of Karma

### INTRODUCTION

The school of Indian philosophy is divided into two big classes namely orthodox (āstika) and heterodox (nāstika). Orthodox means theist and non-orthodox or heterodox means atheist. But in Sanskrit philosophical literature, āstika means one who believes in the authority of the Vedas' or 'one who believes life after death; on the other hand nāstika means the opposite of these. In orthodox system, the chief six schools are the Nyāya, the Vaiśeṣika, the Sāṅkhya, the Yoga, the Mīmāṃsā and the Vedānta. For they accept the authority of the Vedas, they are called āstika. The three chief schools which belong to heterodox are the Cārvāka, the Jaina and the Buddha. These schools are called Nāstika because they do not believe in the authority of the Vedas.

In the history of Indian philosophy, there are four major periods of development up to the time about A.D. 1700. It was the first period (the Vedic period) when the Āryans, coming down from central Asia, settled down in India their new homeland. From there the Āryan culture and civilization was gradually expanded and developed. The literature at the time consists of four Vedas; Rg Veda, Yajur Veda, Sāma Veda, and Atharva Veda, with four parts each known as Mantras, Brāhmanas, Āranyakas and Upanishads. In the second period (the Epic period) the great Epics that flourished were Ramayana and Mahābhārata. It also includes the rise and early development of Buddhism and Jainism. Philosophies such as skepticism, naturalism, materialism, etc, arose together with other heterodox systems and the orthodox systems of Hinduism.

The systematic treaties of various schools were written in the third period (the Sutra period). The critical attitude in philosophy was also developed systematically. The fourth period (the Scholastic period) is one of the explanations of the original Sutras. Different schools of thoughts as stated above developed in the second and third period.

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### The Cārvākas View of Consciousness

The Cārvākas claimed that sense perception is the only valid source of knowledge and that the physical world is the only reality. The physical world is composed of the four elements of matter, namely air, fire, water, and earth. Through the senses all objects of the material world can be directly known. The Cārvākas deny that consciousness is the quality of any unperceived spiritual entity. The existence of consciousness is proved by perception. As consciousness is perceived to exist in the perceptible living body composed of the material elements, it must be a quality of this body itself. What people mean by a soul is nothing more than this conscious living body.

Consciousness is an epiphenomeon or by-product of matter, there is no evidence of its existence independent of the body.<sup>1</sup>

This shows that the existence of a soul apart from the body is not proved; all questions about previous life, after-life, and rebirth are meaningless. Therefore they hold that the soul is nothing but the living body with the quality of consciousness.

According to the Cārvākas, the world comes into existence by the spontaneous combination of material elements. Thus the supposition of God as a creator is unnecessary. They deny the existence of God. Many other philosophers accept liberation as the highest goal of human life. Liberation, again, is conceived as total destruction of all sufferings. But according to the Cārvākas if liberation means the attainment of a state free from all sufferings, in this very life, it is an impossible ideal. Their ideal of the goal of human life is to attain the maximum amount of pleasure in this life, avoiding pain as far as possible. A good life is a life of maximum enjoyment. Enjoyment is the ultimate end of human soul or consciousness. Thus “people should not throw away the opportunities of enjoying this life, in the futile hope of enjoyment hereafter.”<sup>2</sup>

### The Jaina View of Consciousness

The Jainas deny the existence of a first cause, or creator of the universe. The belief that, the cosmic universe had a definite beginning in time is illogical and unthinkable, because that belief involves the further belief that a God, noncreative before creation. The universe, therefore, consisting of jivas or souls and ajivas or beings which are not souls, must necessarily be without beginning without the end. It is not necessary to postulate a deity to explain the nature of the universe, for the eternal existence of jivas and ajivas requires a cosmos, in which they can be manifested.

The Jainas believe in the perfect soul as the Supreme Spirit who is the object of worship and adoration. And the divinity of soul is a potential Supreme soul. In this sense, the Jainas affirm the divinity of the soul and the possibility of human realizing its divinity.

The Jainas accept the common philosophical view of substance, but point out that in every substance there are two kinds of characters: essential and accidental. The former remains in the substance as long as the substance remains, without ceasing to be what it is. For example, consciousness is an essential character of the soul. The accidental characters of a substance come and go succeeding one another. Desires, volitions, pleasure and pain are possessed by soul-substance through which a substance undergoes change or modification, and can be called modes. The Jainas call an essential unchanging character *guna*, and an accidental, changing character *paryāya* or *paryaya*. Hence, it is defined that a substance possesses qualities (*gunas*), as well as modes (*paryāyas*).

<sup>1</sup> S.Chatterjee & D.Datta (1960). An Introduction to Indian Philosophy. Calcutta: University of Calcutta. P-63

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., P-65

According to the Jaina, substance is classified into the extended and the non-extended. Except time (*kāla*), all other substances possess extension. Substances that possess extension are subdivided into the living (*jiva*) and the non-living (*ajiva*). Living substances (*jivas*) are identical with souls or spirits which can be classified into those that are emancipated and those that are in bondage.

A *jiva* or a soul is a conscious substance. Consciousness is the essence of the soul and is always present in the soul, though its nature and degree may vary. Theoretically, soul may be arranged in a continuous series according to the degree of consciousness. At the highest are perfect souls that have overcome all *karmas* and obtained omniscience. At the lowest end are the most imperfect souls that inhabit bodies of earth, water, fire, air or vegetables, where life and consciousness are absent.

As a result of the inclinations generated by its past actions a *jiva* comes to inhabit different bodies successively. It illuminates or renders consciousness to the entire body in which it lives like a light. It has no form but acquires the size and form of the body wherein it lives like a light. In this sense a *jiva*, though formless, is said to occupy space or possess extension. The *jiva* is not infinite but co-existent with the body, and can immediately know objects only within the body. Consciousness is not present everywhere, but only in the body.

For the Jainas, the suffering individual is a *jiva* or a living, conscious substance called the soul, which is inherently perfect and has infinite potentiality within it. Infinite knowledge, infinite faith, infinite power and infinite bliss, can be attained by the soul if all obstacles in the way can be removed from itself. Just as the sun shines forth and illuminates the whole world when the atmosphere is free from cloud and fog, the soul attains omniscience and other perfections inherent in it as soon as the obstacles are removed.

The Jainas assert that obstacles are constituted by matter particles which infect the soul and overpower its natural qualities. Limitations found in any individual soul are due to the material body where the soul has identified itself. As the body is made of particles of matter (*pudgala*), for the formation of a particular kind of body, particular kinds of matter-particles are arranged and organized in a particular way. In the formation of this body the guiding force is the soul's own passions. The *karma* or the sum of the past life of a soul generates in certain blind cravings and passions that seek satisfaction. These cravings in a soul attract particular sorts of matter-particles and organize them into the body unconsciously.

Hence, the passions or cravings of the soul lead to the association of soul with matter. The cause of the passions ultimately spring from our ignorance, which is the real nature of our souls together with other things that leads to anger, vanity, infatuation and greed. Knowledge alone can remove ignorance.

Therefore, the Jainas, stress the necessity of right knowledge or the knowledge of reality. Right knowledge can be acquired only by studying carefully the teachings of the omniscient teachers who already have attained liberation. But mere knowledge is useless if it is not put into practice. Thus according to the Jaina, right conduct is an indispensable condition for liberation. A man has to control his passions, his senses, his thought, speech and action, in the light of right knowledge. This enables him to stop the influx of new *karma* and eradicate old *karmas*, and thereby gradually securing the elimination of matter which ties the soul into bondage.

Therefore, liberation is the joint effect of right faith, right knowledge and right conduct. These three are inseparably bound up, and the progress and degeneration of the one reacts on the other two. Perfection of conduct goes hand in hand with the perfection of knowledge and faith. Through the harmonious development of these three, a person succeeds in overcoming

the forces of all passions and *karmas*, old and new, the soul becomes free from its bondage to matter, and attains liberation. When the soul is free from obstacles of matter, the soul realizes its inherent potentiality. Then it is said to attain the fourfold perfection namely, infinite knowledge, infinite faith, infinite power and infinite bliss.

### **The Buddhist View of Consciousness**

The Buddha categorically rejected all theories regarding the immortality of the soul. He said that the mind of man undergoes change even more rapidly than the body, and there is no place for a soul in either of these combinations. The Buddha taught that neither man nor any of the animals possess anything enduring or substantial that can be called an Ego or Soul. Though denying the continuity of an identical substance in man, the Buddha does not deny the continuity of the stream of successive states that compose his life. Life is an unbroken series of states and each of these states depends on the condition just preceding and gives rise to the one just succeeding it. The continuity of the life-series is, therefore, based on a causal connection running through the different states.

This continuity is often explained with the example of a lamp burning throughout the night. The flame of each moment is dependent on its own conditions and different from that of another moment which is dependent on other conditions. Yet there is an unbroken succession of the different flames. Again, as from one flame another may be lighted, and though the two are different, they are connected causally. Similarly, the end-state of this life may cause the beginning of the next. Rebirth is, therefore, not transmigration. Rebirth is not the migration of the same soul into another body; it is the causation of the next life by the present.

As the present state of consciousness inherits its characters from previous ones, the past in away continues in the present, through its effect. Memory thus becomes explicable even without a soul. This theory of the non-existence of soul (*Anattā-Vāda*) plays a very important role in understanding the teachings of Buddha. He, therefore, repeatedly exhorts his disciples to give up the false view about the self.

The Buddha logically perfects the view of the transitoriness of life and worldly things into the doctrine of impermanence. His later followers develop this further into a theory of momentariness (*ksanika-vāda*), which means not only that everything has conditional and, therefore, non-permanent existence, but also that things last not even for a short period of time, but exist for one part less moment only.

The Buddha points out that people who suffer from the illusion of the self, do not know its nature clearly. Those people strongly protest that they love the soul and they want to make the soul happy by obtaining salvation.

Man is only a conventional name for a collection of different constituents, the material body (*kaya*), the immaterial mind (*manas or citta*), the formless consciousness (*vijñāna*), just as a chariot is a collection of wheels, axles, shafts etc. The existence of man depends on this collection and it dissolves when the collection breaks up. The soul or the ego denotes nothing more than this collection.

All worldly phenomena, including mental and material process, are subject to three characteristics, namely, *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anatta*. All worldly phenomena are composed of *nāma* and *rūpa*. People wrongly conceive *nāma* and *rūpa* (material mental and form formations) as *atta*, something having living entity, or eternal.

In order to remove this misconception of Self and make it clear that there is no such thing as soul or living entity in the *rūpa*, *nāma* of one's own body or in the *rūpa*, *nāmas* of other's bodies, the Blessed One began the

discourse with the pronouncement, Rūpam, Bhikkhave, anatta... Material form, Bhikkus, is not Self, soul, nor living entity.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the existence of all beings, for Theravadins, is composed of five khandhas, aggregates or groups. Briefly, they can be explained as follows.

1. Rūpakkhanda, aggregate of material form
2. Vedanākkhandha, aggregate of feeling
3. Saññākkhandha, aggregate of perception
4. Viññānakkhandha, aggregate of consciousness
5. Sankhārakkhandha, aggregate of mental formation.<sup>2</sup>

According to Mijjhima Nikāya, all corporeal phenomena, one's own or external, gross or subtle, loftily or low, far or near, whether past, present or future all belong to the group of corporeality. All feelings belong to the group of perception. All mental formations belong to the group of formations. All consciousness belongs to the group of consciousness. It is a five-fold classification in which the Buddha summed up all the physical and mental phenomena of existence, and in particular, those which appear to the ignorance man as his ego or personality. Hence, birth, death and the others are also included in these five groups which actually comprise the whole world.

The Buddha's main concern was to eliminate suffering, to find a cure for the pain of human existence. His first teaching, the four Noble Truths, follows this pattern. The Buddha taught that in the search for truth and liberation it was important to avoid two extremes in life. The first is a life that is base, vulgar, common, ignoble and unprofitable. The other extreme is one which is devoted to self-affliction, painful, ignoble and unprofitable. He advised them to follow the Middle Way.

## CONCLUSION

Indian schools of thought are opposed to one another in their teachings. But there is a sort of harmony among them. The schools are outwardly opposed. But there are many positive points of agreement so that these may be regarded as the common marks of Indian culture. The nāstika schools have some points of agreement. The fundamental point of agreement is that these schools regard philosophy as a practical necessity, so for them philosophy would be a part of life.

The nāstika schools see the evil of life. Thus, they want to understand the source of the evil in order to find out the means for overcoming the miseries of life. They try to discover hope and means to attain a state which is free from miseries. Though there is harmony among the nāstika schools, there are also differences among them. One of the differences is concerned with the acceptance of the law of *karma*. Both the Jainas and the Buddha accept the law of *karma* but the Cārvākas do not accept it. The law of *karma* means that all actions, good or bad produce their proper consequences in the individual who acts. This general moral law governs not only the life and the destiny of all individual beings but even in the order and arrangement of the physical law. This law is autonomous and works independently of the will of God, for the Jainas and the Buddha.

<sup>1</sup> Mahasi Sayadaw. (1983). The Anattalakhana Sutta. Rangoon: Buddha Sāsana Nuggaha Organization. P-5

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., P-6

The Jainas and Buddha believe in ignorance as the cause of bondage and liberation whereas Cārvākas do not believe in it. The Jainas and the Buddha believe that liberation is the state of perfection and this state can be attained even in this life. Since ignorance is the root cause of suffering, both Jainism and Buddhism believe that meditation and self-control are necessary. To replace the wrong beliefs by correct ones it is necessary to meditate and concentrate on the truth. On the other hand, for the Cārvākas the highest end of life should be the enjoyment of the greatest amount of pleasure here in this life.

The Jainas, like the Buddha, reject the existence of God. But they still believe that there is the universal soul that is omnipresent in all individual souls. The individual souls are trapped in the physical bodies. For the Jainas, to liberate the individual souls the physical body must be destroyed. The Buddha criticized these views that advocate “self torment which is suffering, ignoble and unprofitable”. The Buddha taught that the Middle Way is the way out of suffering. It is the guideline to attain liberation (Nibbāna) or to live a good life in the mundane world. This paper thus makes an attempt to contribute that even though a group of people share the same principles, the opinions of its members can be different.

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