

PRE-BUDDHISTIC WORLD VIEWS

Skepticism/Agnosticism

- * The dialectical opposition between the soul-theorists, who asserted survival, and the various schools of materialists, who denied it, led to skepticism with regard to the question of survival and other such matters as well.
- * The Skeptics maintained that no conclusive knowledge about any of the matters debated by the philosophers is possible.
- * They pointed out that the various speculative doctrines, especially about the nature of the soul, were mutually contradictory.
- * A Jain commentator, Silanka of the ninth century, speaks in the following vein of the reasons for the growth of the skeptical schools: "In respect of every category there is no uniformity in their assertions; there is no one with an outstanding intellect whose statements may be regarded as authoritative; even if such a person existed, he cannot be discovered by one with a limited vision according to the maxim that 'one who is not omniscient does not know everything,' for it is said 'how can one desiring to know that a certain person is omniscient at a certain time do so if he is devoid of that person's intellect, his knowledge and his consciousness.'"
- * Skeptics adopted skepticism on the basis of various intellectual or pragmatic grounds or both.
- * Some believed that such speculation could only be confusing and harmful or lead to harmful actions (such as disputes) and ultimately remorse and consequent obstruction to peace of mind and should therefore be avoided.

- * Brahmajala sutta mentioned 4 types of such teachers.
 - (i) Deny for fear of uttering falsehood, which is detrimental to oneself. High morality for truthfulness. They know they do not have the answer, so as to avoid uttering falsehood → give rise to skepticism
 - (ii) Deny for fear of clinging to the idea (upadana). Such attachment will bring about remorse, moral danger.
 - (iii) Deny for fear of being questioned further
 - (iv) Deny due to foolishness

- * Skepticism also arises in Upanishads itself

- * Samannaphala sutta: Sanjaya Bellathiputta
- * He is known as vikkhepavadin.
- * Attempted to evade issues by not giving any categorical answer to any question. He appeared to have been of the view that the question of survival and similar questions are beyond verification and it is immaterial as to what we believe.

- * The influence of skeptic can be seen in Buddhism too.
- * However, the Buddha did not advocate a skeptical position with regards to all issues of philosophical importance.

Determinism/Fatalism (Niyati vada)

- * The Ajivaka school.
- * Believed that the life of a human being is strictly determined.
- * The basic tenet was that the whole cosmic process is rigidly governed by a principle called niyati or fate. All events in a person's life are predetermined
- * Life is compared to a ball of thread which when thrown rolls on as long as it is completely unfolded, so fool and wise alike will take their course and make an end of pain.
- * The Ajivakas believed in transmigration on a grand scale, each individual soul passing automatically into final peace after having experienced every possible kind of life in turn (lastly that of an Ajivaka wanderer).
- * This series of incarnations of the soul was supposed to take nearly thirty million million million, multiplied by the number of grains of sand in the bed of the river Ganges years.
- * Karma is independent of individual will and follows its own logic.
- * No place for human effort or will.
- * The Buddha identified two types of deterministic view which are damaging to the moral life:
 - (i) all human experience is predetermined by the will of God (issaranimmanahetu)
 - (ii) all human experience is determined by past kamma (pubbekatahetu)
- * Samannaphala sutta: Makkhali Gosala
- * Buddha: Makkhali is the greatest ill of mankind because such a view negates the efficacy of any human effort to transform one's moral nature.

According to A L Basham in "History and Doctrines of the Ajivikas" suggested that the doctrines of Makkali Gosala, Purana Kassapa and Pakudha Kaccayana were aspects of a single body of teachings.

- * Samannaphala sutta: In harmony with this determinism was the doctrine of 'inaction' (akiriya) propounded by another Ajivaka teacher, Purana Kassapa.
- * All the supposed actions of men, good or bad, are no actions at all, produce no effect or influence on the future
- ➔ hence reject moral causation ➔ ahelikavada

- * Samannaphala sutta: Another Ajivaka teacher, Pakudha Kaccayana.
- * There are 7 elements in the universe (earth, water, heat, air, happiness, unhappiness and soul) which were eternally existing and unchangeable in their very nature. Any supposed action passes ineffectively between their atoms. In other words, there is no such act as killing, or hearing or knowing, no distinction between good and bad, knowledge and ignorance.
- ➔ Akiriyavada

Indeterminism (Chance origination)

- * Those are known as adhiccasamuppannavadins.
- * According to them things happen without cause or reason (ahetu appaccaya)
- * Equally damaging to the moral life ➔ no moral responsibility

Materialism or the Carvaka-darsana (Sanskrit)

- * The name Lokayata or Cavaka has been used for the ancient materialist.
- * Tradition attributes the Lokayata doctrine to a sage called Brhaspati; who along with another figure called Cavaka, were the most outstanding proponents of the materialist doctrine.
- * Believed that everything including the human being is made up of the basic material elements.

- * Held the view that the body and soul are identical – nobody can draw the soul from the body and show it, saying:”Friend, this is the soul and this is the body.
- * Both fools and wise are annihilated with the dissolution of their bodies at death.

- * Samannaphala sutta: Ajita Kesakambali
- * The only valid source of human knowledge is sense perception. What is agreeable to sense perception is truth. Anything beyond perception is doubtful.

- * Every other pramana (sources of knowledge) including inference is rejected.
- * Inference is not true as it involves universal relation which is never clear.

- * Our familiar belief in the validity of inference whereby when it is verified in practical life is due to accidental coincidence as in the case of omens. In other words, inference is nothing more than guesswork.
- * Maintained that the physical world is the only reality; consciousness is unreal because it is not an object of the five senses. The physical world functions according to a set pattern and this pattern they called ‘inherent nature’ (svabhava). Human life and behaviour are completely determined by this physical law.
- * Psychic life is merely a by-product of the four great material elements. (mahabhuta)
- * As a consequence of his view, the Carvaka cannot speak of any order or world system.
- * Dismissed all belief in a supernatural or transcendental being.
- * Testimony or authority is also not reliable because it cannot be verified. It can only be verified by inference and therefore is arbitrary and unreliable.
- * Vedic testimony is also unreliable.
- * According to the “Sarvadarshanasamgraha”, the materialists criticized the sruti or the traditional revelation as a valid means of knowledge.
- * Do not believe in the theory of karmic retribution, theory of rebirth and the efficacy of spiritual practices → no moral responsibility → Akiriyavada
- * Agreed with the Ajivakas in rejecting moral causation, but for opposite reasons.
- * Do not believe in omniscience theory. Skeptical about those with high spiritual attainments.
- * Of the four purusarthas or aims of human life, the Carvaka rejects two, dharma (virtue) and moksa. The other two are kama and artha (wealth/prosperity).

BPFE 102 – Emergence of Buddhism and Basic Buddhist Teachings

- * One must make use of the only opportunity one has got to live as a human being to enjoy as much sense pleasure as possible → Kamasukhalikanuyoga
- * The teaching of Carvaka is said to be epitomized as

*Be happy as long as you are alive
Take a loan and indulge, eat butter
Once the body has turned to ashes
It is not going to come back.*