

those commentaries themselves and treatises (prakaraṇa)—written in prose or verse or both—dealing with select phases of the doctrine. This literature in each case ranges over a very long period, beginning soon after the time to which the Sūtras are assigned and ending only a century or two ago.

## CHAPTER VIII

## MATERIALISM

THE first school of thought we propose taking into consideration is Materialism or the Cārvāka-darśana, as it is termed in Sanskrit. The significance of the term 'Cārvāka' applied to it is not quite clear. Some say that it was originally the name of the disciple to whom the doctrine was first communicated by its founder.<sup>1</sup> More probably the word is to be understood as the equivalent of 'sweet-tongued' (cāru-vāka),<sup>2</sup> which aptly describes the advocates of a doctrine characterized by so much of superficial attractiveness. We have already referred to the Yadrōchā-vāda as its possible source (p. 104) and pointed out its distinguishing feature, viz. the abolition of the idea of causality altogether. Neither the world, nor any event that takes place in it, has anything beyond accident to account for it. As indicated by the other name of Lokāyata-darśana sometimes given to it, there seems to have merged in it the Svabhāva-doctrine, which also had only an empirical basis. The Cārvāka school has been the butt of ridicule for long.<sup>3</sup> The very designations of its followers—cārvāka and lokāyata—have acquired a disparaging sense, much as the term 'sophist' did in ancient Greece, and have become bye-names for the infidel and the epicure.<sup>4</sup> It is in this degenerate form that we find the doctrine summarized even by so early an author as Śaṅkara.<sup>5</sup> One does not expect to find any treatise expounding such a doctrine. Yet a Sūtra on it, ascribed to Bṛhaspati, whom the *Maitrī Upaniṣad* describes as a heretical teacher,<sup>6</sup> is mentioned in old works; and since a few extracts from it are

<sup>1</sup> SS. p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> Whitney: *Sanskrit Grammar*, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. *Naiṣadhīya-carita* (xvii. 39-83), whose author Śrīharṣa was also a great philosophic thinker.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. SV. p. 4 st. 10. Compare also the description of the Cārvāka as nāstika-śiromaṇi or 'arch-heretic' in SDS. p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> See his account of it in the bhāṣyas on VS. III. iii. 53-4. and on *Br. Up.* pp. 552 ff.

<sup>6</sup> vii. 9.

quoted<sup>1</sup> and a bhāṣya or formal commentary upon it also seems to be alluded to,<sup>2</sup> we need not doubt that it existed. But the book is not extant, and it is therefore difficult to say to what extent the teaching deserved the name of darśana or merited the wholesale condemnation to which it has been subjected. The only account of the doctrine we now have is in the *résumé* given in the works of the other schools of thought for purposes of refutation. It is unfortunate that in forming an estimate of its value we have to depend entirely upon the statements of its several opponents. For one thing, they are too meagre to enable us to speak of many details relating to the system. The *Sarva-darśana-samgraha*, no doubt, contains a chapter on it, but it is very brief and adds nothing to what may be gathered from other sources. Again these statements in all probability exaggerate the weak points of the doctrine and may even misrepresent its tenets. Thus it is commonly assumed by the critics that the Cārvākas denounced reasoning totally as a *pramāṇa*; but to judge from the reference to it in one Nyāya treatise,<sup>3</sup> they seem to have rejected only such reasoning as was ordinarily thought sufficient by others for establishing the existence of God, of a future life, etc. Such a discrimination in using reason alters the whole complexion of the Cārvāka view. But this is only a stray hint we get about the truth. What we generally have is a caricature. The special ridicule to which the Cārvāka is held up by the orthodox may be due to the denouncement by him of Vedic authority and of the priestly profession<sup>4</sup>; but this by itself cannot explain it fully, for the Buddhists and the Jains also were hostile to the Veda. We have, therefore, to seek for its cause at least in part in the deficiencies of the doctrine itself, especially on the ethical side, which tended to undermine the foundations of social order and of moral responsibility. The chief importance of the system for us lies in the evidence it affords

<sup>1</sup> See Bhāskara on VS. III. iii. 53; NM. p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> See SAS. p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> NM. p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. stanzas quoted at the end of SDS. ch. i. The Veda is here characterized as unintelligible, self-contradictory, untrue and so forth.

of the many-sidedness of philosophic activity in India in ancient times and of the prevalence of a great deal of liberty of thought as well as of freedom of expression.

## I

The most important of its doctrines is that perception (*pratyakṣa*) is the only means of valid knowledge. Every other *pramāṇa* including inference (*anumāna*) is rejected so that philosophy, which according to the common Indian view ought to be a discipline of life, ceases here to be even a discipline of the mind. The reason assigned for rejecting inference is that there is not sufficient warrant for believing in the truth of the inductive relation or *vyāpti* which forms its basis. The ascertainment of this relation, even supposing that it actually exists,<sup>1</sup> depends upon observed facts; and since observation is necessarily restricted in its scope, it does not entitle us, it is urged, to universalize the conclusion reached with its help. It may be granted for the sake of argument that observation can comprehend *all* present instances coming under a general rule; but even then it should be admitted that there are others which are removed in time and which, therefore, lie beyond the possibility of investigation. While a general proposition may be all right so far as investigated cases are concerned, there is no guarantee that it holds good of uninvestigated cases also. Even the suspicion that it may not is enough to render the general proposition useless for purposes of exact investigation. If to avoid this difficulty we assume that it is not the examination of isolated particulars that is really the basis of induction but only the proper linking up of essential features or universals<sup>2</sup> which are permanently associated with them, the Cārvāka objects that such a course would leave unrelated the particulars which alone are of practical concern. Nor can the universals themselves be taken as its subject, for in that case there would be no inference at all, the so-called

<sup>1</sup> NM. pp. 119-20.

<sup>2</sup> This does not mean that the Cārvāka admitted universals as objectively real. They are assumed here only for the sake of argument.

inferred truth connecting one universal with another being identical with the observed fact itself as stated in the major premise. It is in the quagmire of such a dilemma, as a well-known stanza<sup>1</sup> has it, that a logician finds himself floundering when he tries to maintain the validity of inference. Our familiar belief in the validity of inference, the Cārvāka explains as due to associations established during observation so that it is purely a psychological process with no implication whatsoever of logical certitude. Otherwise how can we account for the notorious differences even in essential matters among rationalistic philosophers themselves?<sup>2</sup> Where the belief is verified in practical life, it is due to accidental coincidence as in the case of omens, etc., which also sometimes come true. In other words, inference is nothing more than guess-work. If the Cārvāka specifically formulates his view in such a manner, it would certainly be a stultifying position for him to assume, because this negative conclusion that inference is not valid is itself the result of induction and points to a conviction that in one case at least the relation of vyāpti holds true. It would then refute itself, for what is rejected would be admitted in the very act of rejecting it. Moreover, his very attempt to convince others of the correctness of his view would imply a knowledge of their thoughts which, not being directly knowable, could only have been inferred by him. But the probability is that the Cārvāka did neither state his view so formally, nor try to convince others of its rightness, but was content with merely refuting the position of the opponents.<sup>3</sup> Usually, however, it is assumed that he did so formulate his view; and it is criticized as above by the representatives of the other systems. They vindicate inference directly also, stating why and in what circumstances a universal proposition may be taken to be valid, though it may be based on a limited examination of the

<sup>1</sup> Cited for example in SD. p. 63.

Viśeṣenugamābhāvat sāmānye siddha-sādhanaḥ:  
Anumā-bhaṅga-pañkesmin nimagnā vādi-dantinaḥ.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Note 3 on p. 182.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. NM. p. 270: Vaitaṇḍika-kathaivāsau na punaḥ kaścīdāgamaḥ.

cases falling under it. But the answers vary according to the systems and it would, therefore, be preferable to deal with them under those systems themselves. We shall accordingly postpone their consideration for the present.

As a consequence of the view taken by him of knowledge, the Cārvāka cannot speak of any order or system in the world. He no doubt admits perception as a means of valid knowledge, but that gives rise only to a piecemeal knowledge of things without connecting them by means of any *necessary* relation. Yet he is stated to have postulated four elements (bhūtas)—each with its own character. So far he is a realist and a pluralist. The elements are to be understood as gross in form; for the Cārvāka, discarding inference as he does, cannot believe in any subtle state which can be deduced only by reason. Commonly Hindu thought recognizes five elements—earth, water, fire, air and ākāśa. While the first four of these are matters of ordinary sense-experience, the last is the result of inference. The Cārvāka, because he admits only the immediate evidence of the senses, denies the last. For the same reason he denies also the soul or ātman as a surviving entity. It comes into being, according to him, with that peculiar concatenation of the elements which we call the living body. The Cārvāka accordingly does not deny a conscious or spiritual principle; only he refuses to regard it as ultimate or independent. It is a property of the physical aggregate of the body and disappears when the latter disintegrates. It is compared to the intoxicating quality that arises by the mingling of certain ingredients such as yeast which separately do not possess it.<sup>1</sup> The entire dependence of consciousness on the physical organism, it is added, is also indicated by the fact that it is *always* seen associated with it and is never found apart from it. The theory may thus be taken as a rough Indian counterpart of the view that mind is a function of matter. His view, as it is sometimes set forth, borders upon

<sup>1</sup> The illustration probably suggests the idea of an 'emergent characteristic,' because the Cārvāka does not admit consciousness as characterizing the factors constituting the body, taken severally. See *Bhāmāī*, III. iii. 53.

modern behaviourism. According to Śālikanātha's summary, for instance, the Cārvāka regards feeling as directly characterizing the physical body and describes it in terms of bodily expression.<sup>1</sup> 'Pleasure, pain, etc., should be regarded as only attributes of the body, for they bring about change in its condition. What is a characteristic of one entity cannot affect another, for then the cause would be operating where it was not. And it is a matter of common experience that the body is affected when pleasure, etc., arise as shown by expanding eyes, a graciousness of look, horripilation and so forth.'

Naturally the denial of the ātman, which occupies an important place in the other Indian systems, provoked the keenest controversy; but theoretically the position of the Cārvāka, it must be admitted, is irrefutable. It cannot be *demonstrated* that the soul or ātman in the accepted sense is. That indeed is recognized by some orthodox thinkers themselves, who accordingly lay stress in their refutation of the Cārvāka doctrine upon the indemonstrability of the opposite position that the body and the soul are *not* distinct.<sup>2</sup> We may also note here some of the more important among the 'arguments' advanced directly against the Cārvāka position: First, if consciousness be a property of the body, it should be either essential to it or accidental. If the former, it should be inseparable from the body and last as long as it does; but it does not, for in a swoon or in dreamless sleep the body is seen without it. If the latter, it implies another agency (upādhi)<sup>3</sup> at work in producing consciousness and cannot, therefore, be wholly ascribed to the body. Moreover, a person waking from a dream owns the dream experience while disowning the dream body, say that of a tiger, as Vācaspati<sup>4</sup> puts it. If the one were a property of the other, both would be avowed or disavowed together. Again it may be true as the Cārvāka holds, that consciousness is always found in association with the physical organism; but it is far from certain that it ceases to be, when the organism

<sup>1</sup> PP. p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. SD. p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> See SP. III. 20. and Mr. J. C. Chatterji's *Hindu Realism*, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> *Bhāmattī*, II. i. 14.

breaks up. For aught we know, it may continue to exist in another manner; and though that such is the case is not proved, even a doubt of the kind is sufficient to reject the position of the Cārvāka that it is a property of the body. Nor can such association of the two in itself, even if constant, prove that one is a property of the other. The eye cannot see, for example, except with the aid of some kind of light; yet it cannot be said that visual perception is a property of light. Similarly in the present case also, the body may only serve as an auxiliary (upakaraṇa) or condition for consciousness to manifest itself. Lastly, if consciousness were really a property of the body, it would, if knowable by one, be knowable in exactly the same way by others as well. The form or complexion of our body, for instance, is perceived not only by ourselves, but also by others. A person's thoughts, feelings, dreams and memories, on the other hand, while they are immediate facts to him, are not known to any other in the same way. The knowledge which a philosopher has of his toothache is different from that of the dentist who treats it. This important difference suggests that consciousness is not a property of the physical body, but of something else or is itself an independent principle which only finds its medium of expression in the body.<sup>1</sup>

## II

The doctrine dismisses necessarily all belief in a supernatural or transcendental being, and with it also belief in everything that constitutes the specific subject-matter of religion and philosophy. It recognizes neither a God who controls the universe nor conscience which guides man; and it does not care for belief in a life after death which, so far as right conduct is concerned, matters more according to the Indian than even belief in the existence of God. It thus draws away

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Śāṅkara on VS. III. iii. 54. The view set forth above represents but one type of Indian Materialism. There were other types also which, though admitting the self to be other than the body, endeavoured to identify it with the senses, vital power (prāṇa) or some other non-spiritual principle. Cf. NM. pp. 440-1.

man's mind altogether from the thought of a higher life and fixes it upon the world of sense. It smothers all consciousness of a deeper reality. Accordingly the ideal, if such an expression is admissible at all in this case, is one of hedonism, pure and simple. Pleasure in this life—and that of the individual—is the sole aim of man. Collective happiness, if it is ever thought of, is regarded as expressible in terms of individual happiness; and there is no conception of a general good to which the interests of the individual are to be subordinated. Of the four *puruṣārthas* or 'human values' (p. 109) the Cārvāka rejects two, viz. *dharma* and *mokṣa*, thus restricting the scope of human effort to the attainment of sensual pleasure (*kāma*) or securing the means therefor (*artha*). Whatever virtues are cultivated are either based upon convention or are the result of worldly prudence. The useful is the only good which the doctrine knows of. Pain is recognized as an inevitable feature of existence; but that affords no reason, it is argued, for denying ourselves pleasure which appeals to us as desirable and towards which we are instinctively drawn. 'Nobody casts away the grain because of the husk.'<sup>1</sup> The Cārvāka is so impatient of obtaining pleasure that he does not even try to secure freedom from pain. He makes a compromise with evil, instead of overcoming it. Every man, according to him, must make the best of a bad bargain and 'enjoy himself as long as he lives.'<sup>2</sup> The repudiation of the traditional teaching and all the moral and spiritual discipline for which it stands is a necessary corollary to this crude utilitarianism, whose motto is 'Sufficient unto the day is the good thereof.' One may think of a school of thought without the ideal of *mokṣa*, but not without that of *dharma* also. It may be that death is final and nothing remains afterwards; but to believe in an ideal of life devoid of *dharma* is to reduce man to the level of the brute. It is difficult to believe that there could ever have existed such a school of thought. Even if we explain its extreme views as due to a reaction against the free specula-

<sup>1</sup> SDS, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Yāvajjīvet sukham jīvet*, which seems to be a parody of the Vedic injunction—*Yāvajjīvam agnihotram juhoti*.

tions and the austere asceticism that were widely current in ancient India, the system, we must admit, should once have inculcated less objectionable principles. The form in which it is now presented has an air of unreality about it. If any proof were required, it is found in its lesson of self-indulgence, which needs not to be taught. It is also somewhat suspicious that the Cārvāka doctrine should consist so much in denying what is accepted by the other schools and so little in contributing any new ideas of its own to the sum of Indian thought.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See SS, p. 100.