UNIT 5 : CĀRVĀKA EPISTEMOLOGY

UNIT STRUCTURE

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5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the means of valid knowledge accepted by Cārvāka philosophy
- discuss the sources of valid knowledge accepted by Cārvāka philosophy
- describe the concept of naturalism
- analyse the issue of the denial of the validity of the Vedas.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

Cārvāka also known as Lokayata is the ancient school of Indian materialism. Cārvāka is categorized as a heterodox school of Indian Philosophy. It is considered an example of atheistic schools in the Hindu tradition. Bṛhaspati is usually referred to as the founder of Cārvāka or Lokayata philosophy. Cārvāka, after whose name this school is so called, is said to be the chief disciple of Bṛhaspati. According to another view, Cārvāka is the name of the founder of this school. The word Cārvāka comes from the Sanskrit word caru "agreeable" and vak "speech". The etymology of Cārvāka is to mean "agreeable speech" or pejoratively, "sweet-tongued" for which this doctrine is superficially attractive. According to another view,

the word Cārvāka derives from the root 'charv' meaning 'to eat' possibly alluding to the philosophy's hedonistic precepts of "eat, drink, and be merry", or it signifies a person who eats up his own words, all who eats up all moral and ethical considerations.

This philosophy is also called Lokayata because it was prevalent (ayatah) among the people (lokesu), and meant the world-outlook of the people. Lokāyata means a commoner and therefore, by implication, a man of low and unrefined taste. The dictionary meaning of Lokāyata signifies "directed towards, aiming at the world, worldly", it holds that only this world or loka is. Lokayata is stated to be the Hindu school where there is "no God, no samsara (rebirth), no karma, no duty, no fruits of merit, no sin."

Cārvāka holds direct perception and experience, as proper sources of knowledge. It embraces philosophical skepticism and rejects Vedas, Vedic ritualism and supernaturalism. According to it all the ceremonies are a means of livelihood for Brahmans. The three authors of the Vedas were buffoons, knaves and demons. It also rejects inference as a means to establish valid, universal knowledge, and metaphysical truths. In other words, according to Cārvāka perception is the only authority; earth, water, fire and air are the only elements; enjoyment is the only end of human existence; mind is only a product of matter. There is no other world: death means liberation. There is no heaven, no final liberation, nor any soul in another world; nor do the actions of the four castes, orders etc. produce any real effect. The Cārvāka view is that; while life remains let a man lives happily, let him feed on ghee even though he runs in debt; when once the body becomes ashes, it can never return again.

5.3 ACCIDENTALISM AND NATURALISM

The Cārvākas are accidentalists and naturalists. Accidentalism is also called the doctrine of sudden emergence (akasmikatvavada). This doctrine states that effects are produced at any time without depending on definite causes. An effect does not depend on any cause, but suddenly comes into being. Accidentalism believes in spontaneous generation of an

event. It had antecedent non-existence and has subsequent existence at any time. A thing by its nature comes into existence at a particular time without any cause. Its appearance is uncaused. Gotama explains accidentalism as the doctrine that an effect is produced without any cause like sharpness of thorns and the like.

Accidentalism is criticized on the ground that if effects did not depend upon definite causes, they would either always exist, or they would always not exist. But if they depend upon other causes, then only they can appear at a particular time. So they are produced by particular causes. Time (kala), nature (svabhava), destiny (niyati), and fate (bhavitavyata) are the causes of all things.

Naturalism means the natural power inherent in different things. Fire has a natural power of burning. Water has a natural power of flowing downward. Naturalism states that all effects are produced by their very nature, and that they cannot be produced voluntarily. Sharpness of thorns and various colours of beasts and birds are due to their very nature. They are not produced by anybody. Fire is hot, water is cool and air has refreshing touch. Their differences are due to their inherent natures. Some entities are eternal beings, others are eternal non-beings. Different things have different characteristics. Their peculiarities are due to their different natures inherent in them.

Naturalism is criticized on the following ground. Svabhāva is one's own nature or peculiar character. It is either the peculiar nature of the cause or the peculiar nature of the effect. If it is the peculiar nature of the effect, it does not exist before the effect, and so cannot determine its production at a particular time. The nature of an effect cannot exist before its production. If svabhāva is the nature of the cause, then the effect has a cause. If the cause does not exist, it cannot have a nature (svabhava). If it exists and has a nature from which the effect springs, then it has a cause. Thus naturalism is undermined.

The Cārvāka do not believe in causality and its universality. Causality is an imaginary relation between antecedents and consequents, which are

perceived together on many occasions. Only antecedence of one event and consequence of another event are perceived. Invariable antecedence of one event and invariable consequence of another event are never perceived. Perception is confined to particular instances. It can never apprehend all instances in the present, past and future. The sequence of two events perceived in the past on numerous occasions may fail in future under unforeseen circumstances. No necessary connection can be known to exist between an antecedent and a consequent. Repeated observation of one event being followed by another produces an expectation in the mind that the antecedent will be followed by the consequent in future on all occasions. Conjunction of two events on numerous occasions produces an expectation that they will always be conjoined. The Carvakas do not believe in the production of an effect by a definite cause and a necessary and invariable connection between them.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is the etymological meaning of the word Cārvāka?

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Q 2: What are the four elements accepted by Cārvāka philosophy?

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Q 3: What is accidentalism?

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Q 4: What is naturalism?

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Q 5: Fill up the blanks.

(a) The only source of knowledge according to Cārvāka is_____.

(b) The other name of Cārvāka philosophy is_____.

(c) Cāru means_____.

Q 6: Write true or false.

(a) Cārvāka is categorized as orthodox school of Indian Philosophy.

(b) "Eat, drink, and be merry" is the ethics Cārvāka philosophy.

(c) Cārvāka believes in rebirth.

5.4 THE DENIAL OF INFERENCE

The epistemological doctrine of the Cārvāka school is that perception (pratyaksha) is the only means of valid knowledge. Cārvāka epistemology consists of a series of negations. They reject inference and testimony as means of valid knowledge. Perception is either external or internal. External perception is due to interaction of five senses and worldly objects. Internal perception depends upon external perception. Manas, the internal organ, can work upon the material supplied by external perception. It is not independent of the external sense-organs. The perceptible world is the only reality. The things perceived by the sense-organs only are real. The other things beyond the reach of perception are not real. Heaven and hell are not real, because they are not perceived. The tactual organ perceived softness, hardness, heat, cold, roughness, smoothness and the like. The gustatory organ perceived sweet, sour, pungent, astringent and other tastes. The olfactory organ perceives agreeable and disagreeable odours. The visual organ perceives walls, jars, posts, man, beast, earth, mountain and the like. The auditory organ perceives various kinds of sounds. The perceptible world is real. It is an aggregate of perceptible things and qualities. The Cārvākas advocate naive realism and empiricism. They regard perception

as the only means of valid knowledge.

The Cārvāka reject inference as a means of valid knowledge. Inference is said to be a mere leap in the dark. We proceed here from the known to the unknown and there is no certainty in this, though some inferences may turn out to be accidentally true. A general proposition may be true in perceived cases, but there is no guarantee that it will hold true even in unperceived cases. Deductive inference is vitiated by the fallacy of petitio principii. It is merely an argument in a circle since the conclusion is already contained in the major premise the validity of which is not proved. Inductive inference undertakes to prove the validity of the major premise of deductive inference. But induction too is uncertain because it proceeds unwarrantedly from the known to the unknown. In order to distinguish true induction from simple enumeration, it is pointed out that the former, unlike the latter, is based on a causal relationship which means invariable association or vyapti. Vyapti therefore is the nerve of all inference. But the Cārvāka challenges this universal and invariable relationship of concomitance and regards it a mere guess-work. The Nyāya believes in a five-membered inference (pararthanumana) for demonstration to others as shown below:

1. The hill is fiery;
2. Because it is smoky;
3. Whatever is smoky is fiery; like a kitchen;
4. The hill is smoky;
5. .: The hill is fiery.

The first three or the last three members of the inference are enough for inference for oneself. Inference depends upon the universal concomitance (vyapti) between the middle term and the major term. The middle term (e.g., smoke) is the sign (linga), which indicates the existence of the major term (e.g., fire). It must be found to exist in the minor term (pakṣa) or the subject of inference (e.g.,the hill). The middle term must be invariably accompanied by the major term. The invariable concomitance of the middle term or probans (sadhana) with the major term or probandum (sādhya) is called vyāpti. It is the ground of inference. This universal relation must be unconditional. It must not be vitiated by any conditions (upādhi). The vyāpti

does not cause inference by virtue of its existence, but by virtue of its being known. Vyāpti cannot be known by perception, external or internal. External perception arises from the intercourse of the sense-organs with their proper objects. There can be no intercourse of the sense organs with all individuals, past, remote and future. Vyāpti is the invariable concomitance of all cases of the middle term with all cases of the major term. But all instances of the middle term and the major term cannot be perceived with the external sense-organs. Nor can vyāpti be known by internal perception. Manas is not independent of the sense-organs in apprehending external objects. It can elaborate the material supplied by external perception. Knowledge of vyāpti is not the knowledge of invariable concomitance between the genus of the probans (e.g., the genus of smoke) and the genus of the probandum (e.g., the genus of fire) because class-characters are not known by perception. Even if they are known by it, the invariable concomitance between their class-characters does not establish the invariable concomitance between the particular instance of the probans and the particular instance of the probandum. Nor can vyāpti be known by inference, since it would lead to infinite regress. One vyāpti is known by inference, which is based on another vyāpti. This vyapti is known by another inference and so on to infinity. Nor can vyāpti be known by testimony, because it is included in inference. If testimony is not included in inference, it depends upon the words of a reliable person. The words are the signs of their meanings. They denote definite objects. Comprehension of the meanings of words depends upon the knowledge of universal concomitance of words with their meanings. So vyāpti cannot be known by testimony, which also depends on the knowledge of another universal concomitance. It involves argument in a circle. We cannot believe in another person's statement that there is invariable concomitance between the probans (e.g., smoke) and the probandum (e.g., fire) any more than we can believe in a dogmatic assertion of Manu. If vyāpti is known by testimony only, there can be no inference for oneself, in which the vyāpti is not pointed out by any other person. Nor can vyapti be known by comparison (upamana), because it depends upon the universal relation between words and objects signified by them. Comparison is the knowledge

of an object (e.g., a wild cow) indicated by the statement of a forester that 'a wild cow is like a cow'. So it depends upon invariable concomitance between words and their meanings. Hence vyāpti cannot be known by comparison. It is not known by perception, inference, testimony and comparison. Inference is not possible, since vyāpti, which is its ground, cannot be known.

Vyāpti is the invariable concomitance between the probans and the probandum free from all conditions (upādhi). A condition is that which does not invariably accompany the probans, but which invariably accompanies the probandum. The absence of all conditions, which vitiate the inference, can never be known. All conditions can never be perceived. The absence of all conditions can never be known by non-perception. If they are known by inference, testimony or comparison, the same difficulty will arise. Further, the knowledge of a condition must precede the knowledge of its absence. The knowledge of invariable concomitance between the middle term and the major term depends upon the knowledge of the absence of the conditions. Thus there is reasoning in a circle. Vyāpti, the ground of inference, can never be known. Therefore inference is not possible.

Vyāpti is said to depend on uniform and uncontradicted perception. It is an enumerative induction based on simple enumeration. It is based on observation of concomitance of the probans (e.g., smoke) with the probandum (e.g., fire) on numerous occasions. But even if they have accompanied each other on numerous occasions in the past, they may not accompany each other in future. The invariable concomitance between them observed so far may have exceptions in future. No necessary connection has been established between them. The invariable concomitance between smoke and fire in all times, in all places, and under all circumstances, can never be known. If all instances of smoke and fire in all times and in all places in the whole world be not perceived, the doubt will persist that smoke may exist without being accompanied by fire. Even if their agreement in presence be known by observation of numerous instances of their co-presence, their agreement in absence can never be known by observation of numerous instances. It is impossible to observe that all cases

of the absence of fire are the cases of the absence of smoke. Non-fiery things are all things in the world other than fire. The non-existence of smoke in all non-fiery things can never be perceived. Thus the universal concomitance of the middle term with the major term can never be known, since their agreement in presence and agreement in absence in the whole world in the past, the present and the future can never be observed. Their invariable concomitance cannot be known through their class-characters because there are no class-characters or universals. So vyāpti, the ground of inference, can never be known. It cannot exist between all particular instances of the probans and the probandum with their infinite peculiarities due to different times, places and circumstances. Vyāpti can neither exist nor be known. So inference is not possible. It can never be valid.

The Cārvākas do not believe in causation and its universality. There is no necessary connection between cause and effect. There is only accidental conjunction of an antecedent and a consequent. The two events are found together on numerous occasions, and therefore produce an expectation in the mind that they will always go together. But there is no certainty about their co-presence. This accidental conjunction of an antecedent and a consequent cannot ensure vyāpti, which is the ground of inference.

Perception is the only means of valid knowledge. The objects, which are perceived, exist. Imperceptible entities do not exist. If imperceptible objects were supposed to exist, then even imaginary things would exist, and the poor would remove their poverty with imaginary wealth, the servants would become masters by imagining themselves to be rich, and all would fulfill their desires with imaginary objects. The distinction between perceptible things and imaginary things would be abolished. There would, therefore, be total collapse, of practical life, which depends upon the distinction between perceptible and imaginary things. Therefore, imperceptible things do not exist. The perceptible world as an aggregate of perceptible things and qualities exists.

But the critics argue that to accept the validity of perception and, at the same time and from the same standpoint, to reject the validity of inference is a thoughtless self-contradiction. The crude Cārvāka position has been

vehemently criticized by all systems of Indian Philosophy all of which have maintained the validity of at least perception and inference. To refuse the validity of inference from the empirical standpoint is to refuse to think and discuss. All thoughts, all discussions, all doctrines, all affirmations and denials, all proofs and disproof are made possible by inference. The Cārvāka view that perception is valid and inference is invalid is itself a result of inference. The Cārvāka can understand others only through inference and make others understand him only through inference. Thoughts and ideas, not being material objects, cannot be perceived; they can only be inferred. Hence the self-refuted Cārvāka position is called sheer nonsense and no system of philosophy. Perception itself which is regarded as valid by the Cārvāka is often found untrue. We perceive the earth as flat but it is almost round. We perceive the earth as static but it is moving round the sun. We perceive the disc of the sun as of small size, but it is much bigger than the size of the earth. Such perceptual knowledge is contradicted by inference. Moreover, pure perception in the sense of mere sensation cannot be regarded as a means of knowledge unless conception or thought has arranged into order and has given meaning and significance to the loose threads of sense-data. The Cārvāka cannot support his views without giving reasons which presuppose the validity of inference.

5.5 THE DENIAL OF THE VALIDITY OF THE VEDAS

The Cārvākas reject the validity of the Vedas, because they are vitiated by falsehood, contradiction and tautology. They are incapable of being the means of valid knowledge. They are false because they make statements which are false. They are contradictory because they make statements, which are incompatible with one another. They are tautologous because they repeat the same statement several times. A Vedic text declares 'one who desires a son should perform Putre??i sacrifice. Yet we find that a son is not born after the sacrifice has been performed. The text is false. So the Vedas have no validity as a source of knowledge. The three Vedas are inventions of cheats, knaves and demons. Their injunctions are

meaningless jargon. The rites and ceremonies enjoined by the Vedas are the inventions of the Brahmanas, who cheat the other castes to earn their livelihood. They are devoid of intelligence and manliness, and cannot earn their living by honest means. The Vedas are mere incoherent ramblings of knaves. The religious rites enjoined by them are intended to be the means of their subsistence. Religion is priestcraft. If a beast killed in a sacrifice goes to heaven, why does not the person sacrifice his own father? If the food offered at the Sraddha ceremony appeases the hunger of the departed souls, what is the need of supplying travelers with food for the journey? Their hunger may as well be appeased by the offering of food at home. If the soul, issuing out of its body, goes to the next world, why does it not return to this world out of affection for the dear ones? When the body is burnt to ashes, how can it come back again? The soul is identical with the body. The rites are the inventions of impostors of their livelihood.

Cārvāka repudiation of the authority of the Vedas is criticized on the following grounds. The Vedas are authoritative, because they are accepted as valid by the great saints, who practiced the Vedic sacrifices with earnestness, untainted by such vicious causes as intention to deceive, association with heretics, eagerness for false disputation due to habit, desire for livelihood and reckless desire for delicious food and drink, whether they are permitted or forbidden by the scriptures. The Vedas are not inventions of crafty priests for their livelihood. The Brahmanas who were averse to all enjoyments, and imposed upon themselves severe penances, and possessed supreme wisdom, could not compose the Vedas in order to deceive the people. The Vedas must be regarded as valid, since they are accepted as valid by great saints. The Cārvāka philosophy is severely criticized not only by the orthodox systems but also by Buddhists and Jainas



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: How many kinds of perception are there?

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Q 8: What is vyāpti?

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Q 9: Why Cārvāka does not believe in causation?

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Q 10: What is Cārvāka epistemology?

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Q 11: Fill up the blanks.

(a) Inference is said to be a mere leap in the_____.

(b) Deductive inference is vitiated by the fallacy of_____.

(c) Vyāpti is the relation between middle term and_____.

Q 12: Write true or false.

(a) Cārvāka believes in the authority of the Vedas.

(b) Inference is based on vyâpti.

(c) Vyāpti cannot be known by perception according to carvaka.



5.6 LET US SUM UP

- Cārvāka epistemology is the doctrine according to which perception (pratyaksha) is the only means of valid knowledge. They reject inference and testimony as means of valid knowledge.

- Earth, water, fire and air are the four elements accepted by Cārvāka philosophy. Cārvāka philosophy rejects ether as an element.
- Cārvāka philosophy is also known as Lokāyata.
- Vyāpti is the invariable concomitance of the middle term or probans (sādhana) with the major term or probandum (sādhya). It is the ground of inference
- The Cārvākas do not believe in causation and its universality. There is no necessary connection between cause and effect.
- Cārvāka do not believe in the authority of the Vedas.
- Cārvāka is categorized as a heterodox school of Indian Philosophy. It is considered an example of atheistic schools in the Hindu tradition.
- According to Cārvāka there is no God, no samsāra (rebirth), no karma, no duty, no fruits of merit, no sin."
- "Eat, drink and be merry" is the ethics of Cārvāka philosophy.
- Cārvāka believes in accidentalism and naturalism.

5.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q. No. 1: The etymological meaning of the word Cārvāka is "agreeable speech" or pejoratively, "sweet-tongued".

Ans to Q. No. 2: Earth, water, fire and air are the four elements accepted by Cārvāka philosophy.

Ans to Q. No. 3: Accidentalism is also called the doctrine of sudden emergence (ākasmikatvavāda). This doctrine states that effects are produced at any time without depending on definite causes. An effect does not depend on any cause, but suddenly comes into being. Accidentalism believes in spontaneous generation of an event. It had antecedent non-existence and has subsequent existence at any time.

Ans to Q. No. 4: Naturalism means the natural power inherent in different things. Fire has a natural power of burning. Water has a natural power of flowing downward. Naturalism states that all effects are produced by their very nature, and that they cannot be produced voluntarily.

Sharpness of thorns and various colours of beasts and birds are due to their very nature.

Ans to Q. No. 5: (a) Perception (b) Lokāyata (c) Agreeable

Ans to Q. No. 6: (a) False (b) True (c) False

Ans to Q. No. 7: There are two kinds of perception external and internal.

Ans to Q. No. 8: Vyāpti is the invariable concomitance of the middle term or probans (sādhana) with the major term or probandum (sādhya). It is the ground of inference.

Ans to Q. No. 9: The Cārvākas do not believe in causation and its universality. There is no necessary connection between cause and effect. There is only accidental conjunction of an antecedent and a consequent. The two events are found together on numerous occasions, and therefore produce an expectation in the mind that they will always go together. But there is no certainty about their co-presence.

Ans to Q. No. 10: Cārvāka epistemology is the doctrine according to which perception (pratyaksha) is the only means of valid knowledge. Cārvāka epistemology consists of a series of negations. They reject inference and testimony as means of valid knowledge.

Ans to Q. No. 11: (a) Dark (b) petitio principii (c) Major term

Ans to Q. No. 12: (a) False (b) True (c) True



5.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very Short Questions

Q.1: What is the other name of Cārvāka philosophy?

Q.2: "Eat, drink and be merry" is the ethics of which theory?

Q.3: Does Cārvāka believes in the authority of the Vedas?

B) Short Questions (Answer in about 100-150 words)

Q.1: What is testimony?

Q.2: What is parārthanumāna?

Q.3: What is vyāpti?

C) Long Questions (Answer in about 300-500 words)

Q.1: Why Cārvāka does not believe in the authority of the Vedas? Give reasons.

Q.2: Why Cārvāka rejects inference as a source of valid knowledge?

Q.3: Discuss the views of Cārvākas regarding causation.

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