Materialism in Ancient India: A Philosophical Analysis of Lokāyata

Dr. Biswajit Dey
Guest Lecturer at Raiganj University
Dept. Of Philosophy
E-mail Id: biswajit21011988@gmail.com

Abstract

India's philosophical history is written largely in terms of its idealist traditions such as Veda, Buddhism, and Jainism, but one of its most intellectually daring traditions has been waylaid by centuries of polemical distortion. Lokāyata - the materialist school associated with the mythical teacher C Hawaiya, held that matter was the only reality and perception was his only source of valid knowledge and the pursuit of pleasure was the only rational human end. These were no fringe provocation but consistent philosophical positions that undermined the very dogmatism that was at the beginning of all the leading schools of Indian thinking. But no original texts of the Lokāyatas have survived, and scholars are almost wholly dependent on the writings of their enemies for an understanding of the tradition.

It is argued in this paper that Lokāyata deserves philosophical attention more than being a mere second-hand smoke that the fact of its marginalization talks more about the sociology of religious power in ancient India as opposed to the fact and ultimate worth of its arguments. The analysis takes a methodological approach of critical reconstruction, analysing the polemical literature of competitive schools - Brahmanical, Buddhist, and Jaina, all accusing one another of tainted doctrines and beliefs - to restore the best version of Lokāyata's positions than what its critics supposedly liked to critique.

The key findings, the paper says, are threefold. And first, the epistemological dependence of Lokāyata on perception alone (pratyaksa) is philosophically more defensible than Lokāyata's naysayers allowed for. Second, with its materialist account of consciousness, it has anticipated, with remarkable accuracy, debates in today's philosophy of mind. Third, the ethical hedonism taxis of the tradition is not the rudimentary sensualism it was presented to be, but an ethical commitment against the transcendent moral structures that are not empirically based.

The intellectual value of the paper is two-fold, namely, in its practice of treating Lokāyata as a philosophical side as well as a historical supplement, and, in insisting in using the comparative device of Greek atomism and the contemporary physicalism as to shewing that the ancient Indian materialism was an element of a larger, inter-cultural, maximal-human endeavour at explaining the world without so recourse as a theological one. For students and scholars of Indian philosophy, this paper provides a corrective to an idealist bias that has characterised the field for a long time.

Keywords: Lokāyata, Cārvāka, Indian materialism, pratyakṣa, philosophy of mind, ancient Indian philosophy, hedonism, epistemology, metaphysical naturalism.

1. Introduction

In the chronicles of philosophy, there is a special class of intellectual misfortune - not the kind where ideas were attempted and miscarried, but were stamped out before they were sincerely tried. The most sophisticated tradition of philosophical materialism in ancient India, Lokāyata, is of this latter category. It held the physical world as the sole reality, that consciousness is just matter organized in a certain manner, that inference without sensory experience was unreliable and that a meaningful life is focused on pleasure rather than dispensing with a cycle of rebirth that, from a materialist perspective, was never well proven to exist. These were important arguments that called for serious rebuttal. Instead they were greeted with ridicule, promulgation and finally applied with purposeful exclusion from the mainstream of Indian philosophizing.

As such, scholars have only been able to study this tradition in bits and pieces through the eyes of its opponents. Not a single completed original text of Lokāyata survives. What is preserved are extracts chosen by the Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina critics who referred to Cava, the philosopher, the name of whose school they had adopted as significant of his cause, precisely for the purpose of robbing him of his glory. This raises a historiographical problem similar in philosophically interesting ways to the problem at hand: how does one reconstruct a tradition based on evidence provided by the people who wished that the tradition had never existed? More importantly, why is it important enough to try?[1]

1.1 The Rationale for This Study

The argument of studying Lokaya guru is not historical only. Indian philosophy has long been subject to what might be called the idealist consensus, a tendency, both in the tradition and among Western scholars who came in contact with the tradition through the media of Vedantism and Buddhism, to consider India's philosophical contribution to the world essentially one of transcendence, detachment, and the elevation of spiritual to a level of primacy over material life. This is not only an incomplete perspective, but it's also a misleading one. It thus leaves an image of ancient Indian thought in which a sophisticated materialist tradition, one that engaged with cosmology, epistemology, ethics, and philosophy of language on fully developed grounds, is conspicuously absent. Students of Indian philosophy who only cover Lokāyata in footnotes to textbooks for the Nyaya or Vedanta schools are getting a sense of the intellectual landscape that is equivalent to reading Western philosophy and not covering Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius because their ideas made the intellectuals of the dominant schools uncomfortable.

There is also a contemporary philosophical reason why we should take Lokāyata seriously. The tradition's basic metaphysical claim about consciousness as a property arising out of the conjunction of material elements in a certain combination rather than a separate entity subjectively residing in the body is not a naive or primitive position. It is close to what modern philosophers of mind mean by physicalism or materialism about the mind, a view held by a substantial majority of professional philosophers in the analytic tradition. Lokaya reached by another route and a notion, but the formal resemblance is such that it will be worth his serious attention, and keep his concept worthy of more than a perfunctory mention in a survey of Indian philosophical thought, actually.[2]

1.2 Research Questions

There are three key questions around which this paper orbits. Firstly, what were the actual assertions of Lokāyata? To what extent can these assertions be reliably reconstructed without the benefit of any primary texts? Secondly, how sound are these assertions, on their own merits and against the background of historical discussions among ancient Indian opponents as well as contemporary discussions in epistemology and philosophy of mind? Thirdly, how do the historical processes of Lokāyata development its birth, relations with other schools of philosophy and its subsequent disappearance tell us about the relationship between the philosophical discourse and institutional authority in ancient India? These are a series of interconnected questions. The answer to the first question shapes the range of the second and the answer to the second affects the consideration of the third. Individually, they constitute an inquiry which is both textual, philosophical and historical.[3]

1.3 Scope, Methodology, and Structure of the Paper.

This article looks at the Lokāyata tradition until the earliest clear references to it can be found in the writings of authors, such as the Artha-sastra, the Mahabharata and the Brahmasutras, through to the most elaborate secondary works attempting to reconstruct the tradition, such as those of Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, Ramakrishna Bhattacharya and Dale Riepe. It covers the period between ancient and early medieval which is the period during which Lokāyata played an active role in the Indian philosophical discussions. [4]

The paper is written using a critical reconstruction methodology. This involves reading the polemical sources less as accurate representations of Lokāyata's arguments and more as data points, from which when

carefully analyzed, it is possible to infer the strongest form of the Lokāyata argument. The rationale is simple: it is not a great philosophical merit for a polemicist to destroy a weak caricature of the opponent's position, while destroying the strongest form of the opposing argument will gain far more respect.

When critiques by either or all of the three above critics, namely, King Dharmakirti and King Kaustubhadatta, are so sharp and detailed, it is safe to infer that the position that the Lokāyatas were arguing against had considerable argumentative strength. This inference is used as a tool for reconstruction in the paper. A selective application of comparative analysis is done. Similarities with pre-Socratic Greek materialism, especially the atomism of Democritus and Leucippus, and Epicurean ethics are drawn, not to suggest historical influence in either direction, but to show that the philosophical strategies used by Lokāyata were part of a wider human effort to devise naturalistic explanations of reality - an effort which was neither unique to India nor dependent upon it.[5]

2. Historical sources and manuscript Landscape of Lokāyata.

To truly explore the philosophy of Lokāyata, it's important first to recognize a difficult fact: the tradition as it was written is lost on the whole. This is no small matter to be mentioned in passing; it is a fundamental methodological problem bearing on all scholarly talk about the school, and is one which must be tackled head-on before any genuine philosophical analysis can begin.

2.1 Etymology and the Question of the Name

The term Lokāyata has an interpretive meaning that scholars have not found a resolution to. The most generally accepted version of etymology ties it to the Sanskrit words loka, which means the world, as well as common people or the ordinary world of experience, and to the Sanskrit word ayata, which means extended or prevalent, or about. In this interpretation, Lokāyata means "that which is prevalent among the people" or "that which pertains to the world as ordinarily experienced." This etymology is consistent with the philosophy of the tradition: a philosophy that is based upon sensory perceptions of the material world, without dependence upon transcendent realities that are hidden from view and that must be revealed through special revelation or meditative attainment to become accessible.

An alternative interpretation, from scholars such as Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, links loka not simply to "people", but to the productive and labouring classes of ancient Indian society, and suggests that Lokāyata may have had populist, or perhaps even proto-materialistic political aspects, which are centrally suppressed together with the metaphysic. Although this interpretation is subject to some debate, it raises an important possibility: that the tradition's disappearance was not a purely philosophical phenomenon, but was bound up in questions of social and religious authority. The third less established derivation recognizes the term as meaning worldly discourse or common reasoning and has Lokāyata as a philosophy that values ordinary empirical experience more than the scripture, or the yoghic see.[6]

The name Cārvāka, commonly used to signify the school and the founding teacher, has added another layer of complexity to the name. Some scholars see Cārvāka as an historical figure, a philosopher who organized Materialistic beliefs existent in India from centuries, into a philosophy. Others see the name as a literary or polemical invention, a convenient personification of the materialist point of view that made it easier for the critics to attack and dismiss. The name can be related to caru (pleasant, agreeable, vak (speech, words) which can be translated as one who speaks pleasantly - a derogative connotation, that materialist philosophy provides only comforting lies, not hard veracitys. If this etymology is correct, then it means that even the name by which the tradition came to be known was contrived by those who sought to belittle it.

2.2 Early References and the Pre-Systematic Period.

Among Indian materialist concepts are those that existed prior to any organized school of thought. Mentions of philosophers who argued against the afterlife, refuted the authority of the Vedas, and gave purely physical accounts of these natural events can be found throughout works that are not inherently materialistic in nature. The Arthaśastra, ascribed to Kauṭilya and written around the fourth century BCE, mentions Lokāyata with reference to Sceptical Teaching (Saptri civilisation), Sannkhya and Yogna as one of the six Anviksiki (philosopher's inquiry) sciences, i.e. intellectual traditions, implying that by this time it was an acknowledged intellectual tradition with its own distinct identity and teachings. The Mahabharata contains passages in which characters voice views which closely resemble Lokāyata materialism and feature the outright denials of the survival of the soul after death and assertions that there are no cosmic rewards of any sort, beyond the immediate social effects of moral behaviour. Interactions between the Buddha and materialist debaters are recorded in the Pali Buddhist canon, especially those about Ajita Kesakambalini who argued that human beings are just collections of four elements and death is the disintegration of these elements.

These preliminary presumptions leave no doubt that materialist thought in India occurred not late, secondarily, or in a sole place. It was in this same intellectual upheaval that the Upaniads, early Buddhism and Jainism were born - a period of great philosophical innovation when the fundamental questions about the essence of reality, knowledge and a satisfying life would be truly debatable and unsettled.[7]

2.3 The Figure of Cārvāka and the Problem of Primary Sources

The attribution of the systematic Lokāyata philosophy to a certain person who is known by the name Carva establishes the expectation for a principal text or at least a foundational event analogous to what is found in the case of Gautama and the Nyaya Sutras or Badrarayan and Brahmasutras. No text of this sort exists or, if it existed once upon a time, it has not survived. The most important primary work on the Lokāyatas is the Tattvopaplavasiṃha - The Lion Which Eats All Principles, written by Jayarasi Bhatta created circa the eighth century CE. Jayarasi's Jnanasara is a revolutionary sceptical piece which deconstructs the knowledge bases of every and all philosophical systems (including Lokāyata) - though its relation to the dominant Cārvāka philosophical tradition is debated. Certain scholars view it as a divergent branch of the Lokāyata, while others see it as representing a philosophical endeavor quite separate from the views of materialism which simply intersects with material themes.

Aside from what Jayarasi has left us, it consists of citations, rephrased statements and referenced arguments interlaced with the writings of those philosophers who disagreed with this particular opinion. The Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha of Madahabacarya, a fourteenth-century summary of the philosophical systems, devotes the first chapter to Cārvāka and is one of the most comprehensive analyses of the tradition at second hand available. Yet Mādhabacharya was a passionate Vedant and his portrayal of Lokāyata - no matter how extensive - cannot be considered an unbiased presentation of the school's best arguments.[8]

2.4 The Problem of the Reliability of Sources

This brings the examination to what can possibly be viewed as the most philosophically significant methodological problem of Lokāyata studies: the issue of the trustworthiness of the sources. Almost all of the meaningful descriptions of Lokāyata philosophy come from a scholar whose academic and often organizational ambitions were met by demonstrating the insufficiency of the materialist point of view. Against this, a counterargument is put forward by the commentator on the Brahmasutra, i.e., by Sunkara. Dharmakirti discusses this from the point of view of the Buddhist understanding of knowledge. Hemacandra mentions it in connection with the Jaina tradition. All these philosophers were highly developed intellectually, and relations with Lokāyata are of great value. The selection of which Lokāyata arguments to present or demonstrate, ways of representing these arguments, and ways of interpreting the stance taken were based on their argument priorities rather than any commitment to truthful presentation.

Ramkrishna Bhattacharya, whose careful philological analysis of the Caves fragments illustrates the most exhaustive recent work on the tradition, has demonstrated that even in the secondary literature, there are gaps which suggest that the critics did not always draw upon the same source material or version of the Lokāyata position. Such heterogeneity has a philosophical merit: when different critics, when acting independently, identify the same line of reasoning with Lokaya think may and may want to do so, it presents them with some evidence that the reasoning itself was actually already present in the tradition. Where there is a substantial difference between critics, the difference signals the need for particular caution.

In a critical analysis of this landscape, it can be pointed out that there is no conclusion of hopelessness about the Lokāyata scholarship but a system of strict methodological commitments. The tradition can only be reconstructed out of adversarial evidence, with the assumption that the strongest version of the argument is in any case more likely to represent what was actually claimed than the weakest. It is to be understood against the background of broader Indian philosophical debates of the period, in which the issues were serious and the arguments important. It should be taken seriously as philosophy, and not just some historical curiosity that tells us only about the sociology of ancient Indian intellectuals. With that as background, the analysis that follows takes place.[9]

3. Basic Philosophical Regularities: The Materialist Global Philosophy.

3.1 Four-Element Doctrine and The Constitution Of Reality

Lokāyata metaphysics: The view that all entities consist of four fundamental aspects: earth (pṛthvī), water (apa), fire (tejas), and air (vayu). Certain later versions of the tradition added a fifth element, space (ākāśa), but this was not universal, and gave rise to debate within the school, as space does not exhibit behaviour similar to the other four elements in any perceptible way. Philosophically significant is the way in which the assertion is constituted: reality consists of a finite set of physical entities, the combinations of which produce the full range of experienced phenomena, from rocks and rivers to animals and human beings, to the constituents of conscious thought.

This way of thinking isn't as ontologically simple as it may appear at first sight. The four-element principle requires a theory of amalgamation, a theory of the manner in which different arrangements of identical basic elements produce different results. The Lokāyata came close to this in what could be called a proto-emergentist view. Like the blending of certain ingredients, in specific amounts, that creates the inebriating quality found in alcoholic drinks - a property that is not contained in any single ingredient - the way the four elements are arranged in the unique setup that forms a living human body creates consciousness - a quality that is not contained in any of the elements alone. This comparison, which is found in various secondary sources giving the Cārvākas viewpoint, is philosophically precise. It makes no claim on behalf of the concept of consciousness to be explained by its physical components to the exclusion of all else, but that consciousness results from their being so arranged is sufficient to explain the phenomenon, without bringing in any other substance, no non-physical substance, to explain it.

The four-element theory also has a cosmological significance. If all existence is composed of these components then the cosmos is self-sustaining. It does not require a creator deity, a sustaining force of divinity and a purposeful framework, aimed at liberating souls. According to the Lokāyata view, the cosmos is a material system operating according to its in-house dynamics without any external supervision or inherent aim or purpose in the system. This cosmological naturalism isn't discussed at great length in the modern secondary literature, but it's naturally an outgrowth of the metaphysical premise, and its ramifications in theological and soteriological doctrine are deep.[10]

Table 1 : The Four Bhūtas (Elements) in Lokāyata Metaphysics

Element (Bhūta)	Sanskrit Term	Sensory Quality (Tanmātra)	Physical Domain	Role in Consciousness
Earth	Pṛthvī	Smell (gandha)	Solid matter, bodily tissue	Structural basis of the body
Water	Āp	Taste (rasa)	Fluids, cohesion	Circulatory and vital functions
Fire	Tejas	Sight/form (rūpa)	Heat, metabolism, digestion	Cognitive and perceptual activity
Air	Vāyu	Touch (sparśa)	Motion, breath, vital force	Animating and respiratory functions
Space*	Ākāśa	Sound (śabda)	Medium for motion	Contested not accepted by all Lokāyata thinkers

3.2 Consciousness as an Emerged Property of Matter

The Lokāyata views of mind and consciousness are the aspect of the tradition that has remained of interest to modern philosophers, and for good reason. The position can be well articulated: that consciousness is not something independent and separate from the body, that it is not something ethereal, a soul, something self-illuminating, that is, without the body and has nothing to do with it. It is subject to something becoming a certain degree and type of arrangement. When the body stops functioning and elements that created it scatter away, consciousness does not pass into the other body, but it does not merge into the collective consciousness. It just stops, because that physical set-up which has created it is no longer there.

This claim was made in the context where very few other philosophical traditions in ancient India recognized some kind of an enduring self or consciousness that persisted after physical death. The Brahmanical traditions claimed the existence of the indestructible, undefinable self-called the atman that goes through cycles of reincarnation until it arrives at a point of liberation. Buddhism rejected the relevant existence of the significant ātman but retained a causal stream of consciousness that went on throughout various livelihoods. Jainism came up with the jiva, a fundamental part, or soul, that was distinct from matter, which accumulated karmic materials and sought to be released through ascetic cleansing. In contrast to all of these, Lokāyata insisted that in the case of after death, there was an absolute absence of any evidence of any kind of consciousness. One keeps in mind that consciousness is present with physical existence, and it leaves with physical death. Any claim that it will continue in the afterlife must be an inference and since inference without the perceptual basis - as the epistemology of the tradition would surely maintain - is not a reliable source of knowledge.[11]

The philosophic depth in this position is determined by what it does not claim. The Lokāyata did not assert in any simple way that consciousness is identical with physical things. Consciousness would seem to be based from the inside out; the four elements, in themselves, have by no means any sensation at all. The reason given by this tradition for this obvious discrepancy was the combinatorial or emergent explanation outlined previously. The question as to the adequacy of this response is one of the questions that is live in

modern philosophy of mind, known as the "hard problem of consciousness." Philosophically important is the fact that the Lokāyata clearly recognized the problem and came up with a cogent solution, which allows for the reality of conscious experience, but does not concede that it requires some non-material explanation.[12]

3.3 The Rejection of Karma, Rebirth, and the Ātman

The Lokāyata's denial of karma, rebirth, and the atman was not just a consequence of its materialistic views, though this too was a part of it. It was a similarly individual critical position resting as it did upon the epistemological principle that only claims to knowledge perceptible to thought are justified. Neither karma nor reincarnation nor self can be perceptibly gained. Nobody witnesses karma to build up, nobody recognises the movement of soul from one form to another & the atman, as defined by Brahmanical schools, is exactly what transcends sense perception. From the Lokāyata point of view, this is not evidence of the profundity or spirituality of these ideas. This represents their epistemic unfitness.

The rejection of karma had important moral consequences, which were handled by the tradition with its customary straightforwardness. However, if actions do not accumulate transcendent merit or demerit influencing future rebirths, then it seems that the elaborate system of ritual responsibilities, caste duties and ascetic practices justified by reference to karmic consequences loses any logical basis. Vedic sacrifices fail to purify the soul as there is exclusion of a soul to cleanse and no universal system through which the ritual actions lead to future outcomes. According to the Lokāyata view, Brahmanical authority, which was grounded in claims about the efficacy of rituals and the exclusivity of the priests in the realm of knowledge of transcendent truths, represented a form of socially constructed deception - a strong criticism, but one that grew straight out of the epistemological assumptions of the tradition.

The denial of the ātman made the Lokāyata philosophy differ from the Buddhist no-self in a great philosophical way. Buddhism rejected the idea of a fixed, unchangeable self, but it still had to employ the conventional or functional self, which served as the focus of ethical responsibility and karmic history. The Lokāyata developed it further by rejecting not only the permanent self but also any self that was considered to be distinct from the living body. What is referred to as the self is just the body, living and perceiving. When the body ceases to live, there is no entity, conventional or not, which continues.[13]

3.4 The Naturalistic Description of the Universe

When viewed all together, the doctrine of four elements, the emerging view of consciousness, and the rejection of karma and of atman create a naturalistic perspective - a description of reality that explains all occurrences in terms of material causes, without reference to supernatural forces, higher purposes, or non-physical entities. The universality of the Lokayatists consists in emergence through material combination, continuance through material continuity and end through material dissolution. It is a world without cosmic justice, with no intrinsic moral value, and which does not provide any guarantee that good will be rewarded and evil chastised beyond immediate social and physical repercussions that accrue from human activities in a material existence.

This naturalism was philosophically logical and consistent with itself. It was also extremely menacing to social and religious establishments whose power depended on claims of transcendent truths that the Lokāyata always denied. Grasping the importance of these aspects - the philosophical depth of the Lokāyata viewpoint and the societal consequences of the meanings is necessary if we are to understand why the tradition had a philosophical value and why it was so severely suppressed.[14]

4. Epistemology: Perception is the Only Source of Valid Knowledge

In classical Indian philosophy, one of the epistemological bases on which every school based its wider philosophical assertions was the idea of pramāṇa, a valid source of knowledge. The number of pramāṇas accepted by a school and which it did so influenced what it could validly assert about reality. The Nyay tradition recognised four sources, such as inception perception, inference, analogy and testimony. The

Mīmāṃsā recognized six. Buddhism and Sata recognised two or three, according to the sub-school. Lokāyata acknowledged that there was only one source: pratyaksa = direct sensory observation. This was not a mistake and not a lapse of philosophical creativity. It was a commitment to epistemology of fundamental implications.

The case for confining valid knowledge to perception was based upon a clear need for evidence-based support. Perception is the only method of knowing that deals directly with what it knows about. Every other alternative proffered pramāṇa does, at some point in its justificatory sequence, rest on the authority of perception, or else makes claims that go beyond any possible perceptual verification. Inference (anumana), the most important of the philosophical competitors, was the principal point of the Lokāyata philosophy in the criticism of knowledge. Inference involves moving from visible evidence to unseen conclusions by the intervention of a universal link (vyapti) between two, with a correspondence between smoke and fire being the common example. The Lokāyata challenge was apparent: on what basis is any vyapti considered really universal? Each instance of a universal link that an individual has verified is limited to a certain number of certain perceptions. No resources of observed correlations will warrant a truly universal claim about all situations including the unobserved ones. The disparity between what perception dictates and what inference requires can never be fully bridged by perception alone, and it is also suggested that inference always has at least some epistemic risk that its proponents tend to underestimate.

The dismissal of spoken evidence (śabda) respected a comparable reasoning. Testimony serves to communicate assertions from one individual to another, but its dependability ends up depending on the perceptual access of the person at the head end. When that origin is a holy scripture that claims to know things transcendent that no human perception has ever accessed, the chain of epistemic justification just doesn't get weaker; it snaps entirely.

What makes the epistemological standpoint of the Lokāyata so interesting, instead of just mediocre, is its coherence. The school did not apply its skepticism about the use of inference only to inconvenient metaphysical claims while subtly making dependence on the use of inference in other domains. It brought the standard overall, taking with it the costs involved, including the inability to justify some commonsense beliefs dependent upon inductive reasoning. That intellectual integrity in the face of such discomfort shows a philosophical discipline that its detractors rarely recognised.[15]

Table 2: Lokāyata Epistemology vs. Rival Schools Treatment of Pramāṇas

Pramāṇa (Knowledge Source)	Lokāyata Position	Nyāya Position	Buddhist Position	Lokāyata's Core Objection
Perception (Pratyakṣa)	Only valid pramāṇa is accepted unconditionally	Valid primary source	Valid primary source	No objection; foundational
Inference (Anumāna)	Rejected as independently valid	Four types recognized	Valid two types recognized	Universal connection (vyāpti) cannot be perceptually established

Comparison (Upamāna)	Rejected	Valid	Reducible to perception/inference	Derivative of perception; adds nothing independent
Testimony (Śabda)	Rejected	Valid especially Vedic	Limited validity	Traces back to unverifiable perceptual claims at its origin
Postulation (Arthāpatti)	Rejected	Valid (Mīmāṃsā especially)	Rejected	Inferential in structure; the same objection applies
Non-cognition (Anupalabdhi)	Rejected	Accepted by some schools	Partially accepted	Absence is not a positive perception

5. Metaphysics - Matter, Mind and Denial of the Soul

The metaphysical position of Lokāyata introduces one of the most philosophically difficult questions that the framework of any materialism must answer: what is mind, and how does the subjective character of conscious experience fit in a purely physical view of reality? The Lokāyata was a direct answer to this question. It dealt with it by taking a position that combined ontological simplicity with actual explanatory ambition.

Any response by the tradition began with the anticlimactic rejection of substance dualism. There is no non-physical soul (ātman) directing the body from within, observing consciousness is not apart from physical activities, and there is no life force that energises matter from without. The body is not simply a container for something that is more important than the body. It is the essential element per se. What Brahmanical philosophy called the ātman - timeless, self-radiant, immaterial to physical change, the Lokāyata saw as a philosophical illusion, which arose to meet problems that do not really call for a non-material solution and which a non-material solution cannot solve except by causing much worse problems in turn.[16]

The mind, for this reason of this fact, is what a properly structured body does. Thought, perception, desire, and memory are not functions of a soul utilizing the body as its tool. These are activities of the body created by that peculiar arrangement of matter which distinguishes a living organism from a lifeless organization of elements that are identical molecules. This stands in accord with what contemporary philosophers of mind call token physicalism - the view that each particular mental occurrence is identical with some particular physical occurrence - although the Lokāyata embraced it without neuroscience's and analytic philosophy of mind's elaborate form of words.

There was a direct metaphysical implication in the rejection of the soul. According to the Lokāyata analysis personal identity is totally developed by the continuity of the body. Memory, personality, and having a sense of continuity over time are facts of material composition, not arguments of non-material basis. When the body stops functioning, there is nothing left. There is no life-after-death subject since experience is dependent on the physical body eliminated by death.[17]

What makes this stance philosophically unique is the denial of the existence of the hard problem of consciousness - the explanatory gap between the physical processes and personal experience - as evidence for non-material substance. The Lokāyata admitted the gap to be a genuine conundrum even though it is clear that the presence of this gap does not warrant the conclusion of the existence of a soul. It argued that this conclusion replaces two enigmas with one.

6. Ethics and Hedonism of Lokāyata

6.1 Philosophical Case of Kama as the Highest End

The Lokāyata position on pleasure as the final puru-shaarta was not just a mask of the sense demanding pleasure presented under the garb of philosophy. It was the natural outcome of the broader obligations of the tradition. If consciousness is an attribute of the living organism and death means its irrevocable end, then the whole system of deferred gratification underlying the Brahmanical and ascetic morality - endure suffering now, do renunciation now, acquire merit now, in turn for liberation or improved rebirth later - breaks down. There is no guarantee of a future, metaphysically speaking. The only experiential reality that an individual can be certain of is the one that he or she is presently experiencing. For that reason, arranging your life so that you are happier with it and less hurt right now is not a failure to be moral. It is logical coherence.

The tradition recognized - with significant philosophical sincerity - that there can be no separation of joy from suffering in human existence. The well-known Lokāyata argument - at times mentioned by secondary sources as the "bones and fish" analogy - holds that one does not refuse to eat fish because the bones are present with the meat. The fact of pain as an unavoidable element in the pursuit of pleasure does not nullify pleasure as an objective. It just requires enjoyment to be sought wisely, taking into account the effects on both the natural and the social environments.[18]

6.2 Critique of Ethics based on Dharma

The Lokāyata criticism against the dharma-based ethical frameworks functioned on two levels simultaneously. At the epistemological level it challenged the Vedas as the authority of moral duty. If the Vedas are not a valid pramāṇa - and according to Lokāyata, the evidence from non-perceptual origins is not - then the obligations mentioned in a Vedic literature are not supposed to have any obligatory power outside the social marks. The complex structure of caste obligations, guidelines of ritual and ascetic penance taken by Brahmanical ethics from Vedic authority was, from the point of view of the materialist, a socially-invented system disguised as universal law.

On a metaphysical level the analysis went further. Dharma-based ethics promotes the view that actions with moral content need to produce effects that transcend their immediate material consequences - that virtue generates merit, in a karmic ledger, which affects future existences. Remove the philosophy of karma and rebirth from the ethical framework, as required by the metaphysics of Lokāyata, and the foundation of dharma becomes much weaker for motivation. What is left, however, is a framework of societal norms that has been falsely claimed to have cosmic underpinnings when in fact, it is dependent, fabricated and often intended to benefit the priestly class that had enforced it.[19]

6.3 Crude or Sophisticated? Rethinking Lokāyata Hedonism

The prevailing objection to Lokāyata ethics, repeated over the centuries of critical secondary sources, is that its hedonism is an intellectually simplistic moral philosophy of self-indulgence with no real substance behind it. This description doesn't hold up to being thoroughly scrutinized. The Lokāyata view, however did not try to argue that all pleasures should be sought without discrimination or that social ties and duties are not important. The basic foundation for any ethical restriction should come from its actual impact on human wellbeing in this life, rather than from appeals to higher powers and rewards in the afterlife.

This is closer to a form of naturalistic consequentialism than to the deadly vapid hedonism of its critics. It requires moral reasoning to be transparent about its basis; it requires the reasoning to defend the claims based on what actually matters to actual persons leading actual lives, not on metaphysical ideas whose validity cannot be shown. In this respect, Lokāyata ethics does not stand on the fringes of Western philosophy, but is in fact closer to the utilitarian tradition of ethics than is generally acknowledged.[20]

6.4 Social and Political Implications.

The social implications of the ethics of Lokāyata were revolutionary and from the perspective of the existing institutional power were truly dangerous. A moral framework that denied that caste responsibilities were universally valid, that the special power of the priests as intermediaries between mankind and the divine was authentically real, and that ethical duties could be derived from innate and not disclosed scripture realities, was not simply philosophically unconventional. It was a simple challenge to the social structure that Brahmanical religion reflected and supported. The fact that this challenge was articulated in the language of thorough philosophical thought, instead of political unrest, made it, if anything, more dangerous - and more in need of repression.

7. Lokāyata in Philosophical Dialogue-Brahmanical, Buddhist, and Jaina.

No philosophy tradition can evolve independently and Lokāyata is no exception to this. Its assumptions about matter, consciousness and understanding drew constant reactions from all major schools in ancient India, and these, whether polemical or not, seem to be the most important record of what the materialist tradition was really contending. Examining these critiques closely reveals not only the ways that opposite schools viewed Lokāyata, but also how much they felt compelled to take it seriously even with their expressed distaste.[21]

7.1 Brahmanical Responses

The most important Brahmanical connection with Lokāyata comes from the eighth century Advaita Vedānta's thought, the philosopher Śaṅkara, who in his analysis of Brahmasutras addresses the materialist outlook with exceptional philosophical clarity. The major target of criticism by the philosopher Śaṅkara was the new explanation of consciousness. He argued that consciousness could not arise from the combination of unconscious material elements because a combination, however complex, can only produce an elaborate combination of the characteristics that existed in the elements being combined. Since none of the four bhūtas has consciousness by themselves, their merging cannot do any. This argument has philosophical weight and anticipates current discussions of the explanatory divide between physical processes and personal experience.

What had not been adequately addressed by the sides of the debate, which were led by the Bhakti movements and the text Panchatantra respectively, was the Lokāyata argument against: eminent properties very often emerge in combinations where the individual components do not have those properties by themselves. The great attractive power of fermented liquids, the fluidity of water (composed of non-liquid hydrogen and oxygen atoms), not the same, but they go to show that emergence is not philosophically suspect simply because the emergent property is surprising. The rebuttal of Shaularama in his works appeared strong enough in the context of his own metaphysical system; however, he raised a question against a tradition that dismissed his system right in the beginning itself!.[22]

7.2 Buddhist Responses

The Buddhist engagement with Lokāyata was philosophically more nuanced as Buddhism was not at a loss regarding certain structural commitments with the materialist tradition such as the rejection of a permanent atman, while distinguishing itself radically on the questions of consciousness and causation. Dharmakiri (seventh-century Buddhist epistemologist) presented what is still regarded as the most technically sophisticated ancient Indian criticism of the Lokāyata restriction of valid knowledge to perception alone. In the denial of inference being a valid pramāṇa he argued it is self-defeating: his own claim that inference

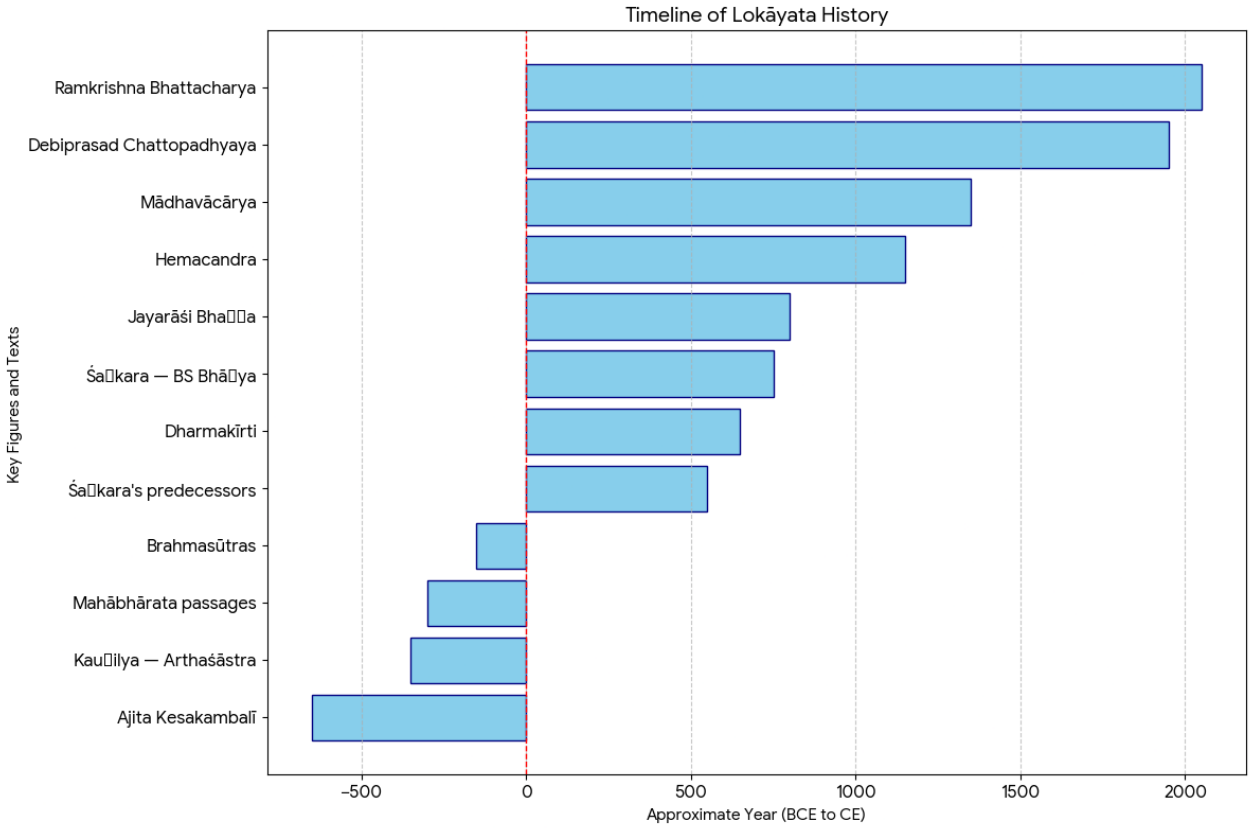
is never trustworthy is itself an inference, one which cannot be proved by perception. Generalizing on this interpretation, the Lokayaata discredited itself, consisting in a declarative on its part that it could not warrant the understanding which it had itself.

This critique does have some real bite, and exactly the kind of internal pressure to suspect that sophisticated philosophical dialogue generates. Whether the Lokāyata had a fully developed response to it is unclear from the surviving secondary literature, but the sort of structural problem that Dharmakirti pointed out, namely that radical empiricism has difficulty justifying itself without secretly appealing to the very kind of reasoning that it prohibits, is still a live challenge for strict perceptualist epistemologies across philosophical traditions.[23]

7.3 Jaina Responses

Hemacandra, a Jaina polymath from the twelfth century, investigated Lokāyata from the ethical rather than the strictly epistemological perspective and argued that the hedonism of the tradition was neither philosophically sound nor morally wholesome. His criticism was directed at the consequences for society of a view of the world that did not take into account karmic responsibility: for if there were no spiritual consequences to actions, and if pleasure were the only logical goal, then the constraints that made possible a civilized and kind existence were stripped of their deepest rational basis. This objection is more an objection to the ethical adequacy of Lokāyata metaphysics than a refutation, but it does point out a real tension in the tradition with respect to the tension between its great striving for philosophy and its ability to create a workable social ethics.[24]

The impact of these responses on the whole shows that Lokāyata was not ignored but was continually dealt with for centuries and in different philosophies by the great thinkers. The regular critical attention is in itself evidence of the philosophical importance of the tradition.[25]



8. Marginalization, Survival, and the Legacy of Lokāyata.

The Lokāyata light losing its place in the Indian philosophical conversation was not necessarily merely the natural death of a school of thought that exhausted itself. It was a result of sustained institutional pressure brought on by religious groups whose power the tradition openly confronted. When a philosophical tradition, questioned in its epistemic foundations for clerical authority, negated the universal acceptability

of caste stratification, and an enterprise of negation directed against the transcendent structure that lent a social necessity for religious institutions, its marginalization said far more about the politics of knowledge than the soundness of its arguments.[26]

What remainedѡon remained remained then in pieces - being incorporated into the writings of those who contested, ironically enough thanks to the same traditions that would seek to undercut it. This survival, however, incomplete and skewed, kept alive the materialist inquiries active in the Indian intellectual culture for centuries when there was no institutional framework for their free development.[27]

The heritage of Lokāyata is spread over two avenues. Opponents of the caste system, religious authority and empiricism reengaged in its disputes in India in a process of the discovery of a native Indian philosophy precursor to the thoughts they were developing under the influence of the Western Enlightenment philosophy as rationalist and reformist movements. Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya's efforts, over a period of many years, in attempting to revive the materialist tradition in Indian philosophy, are an example of the most extensive current attempt to place the Lokāyata in proper perspective in the history of Indian thought.

Outside of India the tradition resolves a philosophical problem that does not recognize any particular culture or time period but is general enough to apply to the existence of the human species with its knowledge, values and place in the natural environment, without making it impossible to verify what cannot be seen, tested or verified. That project, however, is yet incomplete and this is exactly the reason why Lokāyata merits substantial consideration.[28]

9. Conclusion

Lokāyata deserves a place in the history of philosophy that has been denied to it due to its prolonged marginalization. This article has argued that the tradition was not a moribund illustrative challenge or a philosophical cul-de-sac but a thorough and coherent cluster of ideas addressing the fundamental issues of metaphysics, epistemology and ethics with lucidity and intellectual integrity. Its ontology of four elements, its emergent understanding of consciousness, its methodical restriction of valid knowledge to the form of perception, and its naturalistic moral scheme were a unity of system - one whose suppression stemmed rather from institutional reasons than from logical refutation.[29]

The reconstruction of Lokāyata along antagonistic lines is always skewed at the level of morality; and intellectual honesty requires us to admit that. From the controversial compositions of Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina opponents, one can note down a philosophy strong enough to continue raising critical attention from the brightest brains of Ancient India. That involvement alone is enough proof of the importance of the tradition.

Three findings made in this analysis are of considerable importance. The Lokāyata epistemological commitment to pratyaksa as pramāṇa sans crane is more philosophically justifiable than its critics realize, although its wide hierarchical reach is an occasion for internal conflicts that this tradition did not fully manage. Secondly, the materialist take on consciousness anticipates modern considerations in the philosophy of mind with a 'structural clarity' which demands comparative attention rather than historical interest. Third, Lokāyata hedonism (when properly understood) is an ethical naturalism according to principles rather than an intellectual libertinism as its critics made it out to be.[30]

The gaps left by this paper are in fact, invitations. A more comprehensive *Cārvāka*s fragments recovery, large-scale comparative analysis with Greek and contemporary materialism, and a detailed study of Lokāyatas links with that of subaltern social traditions in ancient India are authentic and ongoing work of scholars. The custom had to last centuries to get recognition. That process is just underway

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