

Preface

I started writing on the Cārvāka, the most uncompromising materialist school of philosophy in ancient India, from 1995 and have continued to work on its different aspects. My researches on this subject are now being offered in a revised and enlarged form, thanks to the interest shown by Dr Federico Squarcini, Florence University.

Each chapter is meant to be read separately, hence some repetitions have been retained. In some cases, references have been made to other chapters. This makes every chapter self-complete and, at the same time, helps readers follow my line of argument.

Admittedly, there is paucity of material relating to the Cārvāka. Still, as in the case of the Presocratic philosophers of Greece, it is possible to reconstruct the basic tenets of this system on the basis of whatever little is found in the works of its opponents and the extracts quoted by them. Notwithstanding distortions, the Cārvāka/Lokāyata has emerged as the lone contender against the pro-Vedic Brahminical schools on the one hand, and the non-Vedic Buddhist and Jain schools on the other. Besides the orthodoxy prevailing around the Vedas, belief in after-life and after-world has been the bone of contention. This will be evident from the way I have arranged the Cārvāka fragments in Chapter 6.

My endeavour has been to disprove certain notions about the Cārvāka/Lokāyata —two of which are generally admitted as being beyond doubt. They are as follows: (a) the Cārvāka-s did not approve of any other instrument of cognition except perception, and (b) they advocated unalloyed sensualism and hedonism. I have tried to show that both the charges are groundless calumnies. As to the first charge, there is enough evidence to show that the Cārvāka-s, in spite of their difference of opinion in other areas, did admit inference in so far as it was grounded on perception. As to the second charge, my contention is that no authentic Cārvāka aphorisms have been cited by the opponents of the Cārvāka to support their view. Moreover, the same charge was brought also against Epicurus, despite the fact that he disapproved of sensual gratification as the end of life. The common belief that all materialists are nothing but sensualists is a misconception.

It has also been my endeavour to establish the fact that there existed a pre-Cārvāka school of materialism in India, although there is no way to prove that the Cārvāka system grew out of it. On the other hand, if the evidence provided by the *Manimekalai* (and indirectly supported by the *Mahābhārata*) is admitted, the two schools seem to have continued to exist side by side. The chief difference between the two is that the earlier materialists took the number of elements to be five (earth, air, fire, water and space) while the Cārvāka-s admitted only the first four.

It is now for the readers to judge how far I have succeeded in my attempts.