

ŚRĪ VAIṢṆA VITE REBUTTAL OF THE CĀRVĀKA DOGMA

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Abstract

Vaiṣṇava Śaiva, Śākta, Soura, Gāṇapatya, Skanda, Buddhism, Jainism and Cārvāka have been the faiths of this land over centuries. The first six are based on Vedic tenets while the last three have denounced Vedic doctrines and were built on the idea of sensual perception and personal discipline. The Cārvāka faith, in particular, posits that life and death are but chemical changes that appear and disappear with time and thus transmutes the human with six senses into an instinct-driven beast. The Vedic faiths have rejected the non-Vedic through works of debate and reason, using arguments from the Vedas. This paper presents a brief outline of how Viśiṣṭādvaitic works condemn Cārvāka and its teachings, with particular focus on Sri Desika's denouncement of the Cārvāka principles. The arguments of the Viśiṣṭādvaitic scholars against nihilistic dogmas such as Cārvāka aim at the attainment of the highest good or *summum bonum* of our life.

There have, in our vast country, been a multitude of beliefs, faiths and religions for many millennia, with well-established codes of conduct and practice. These codes were aimed at showing people the way to live righteously. To believe in a dogma with one-sided opinions and beliefs is against common sense, as is the dependence on beliefs that are built merely on intuition and research. In order to live a purposeful life, it is essential to follow beliefs and codes that are clearly laid out.

Where from does true knowledge arise?

One attains this true knowledge, called *Prameya*, through the five senses, called *Pramānā*, becomes the soul or *ātma*.

Religious faiths in this land

Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, Śākta, Soura, Gānapatya, Skanda, Buddhism, Jainism and Cārvāka have been the faiths of this land over many centuries. Of these, the first six were based on the tenets propounded by the Vedas. Vaiṣṇava holds *Śrīmān Nārāyaṇa* as the supreme Lord. In Śaiva, Śiva is the supreme. Śākta gives the status of supremacy to Parāśakti, the female power that is responsible for creation, sustenance and destruction of this world. For Soura, the visible Sun is the supreme being. Vināyaka and Muruga are the Gods for the remaining two beliefs. After the advent of Ādi Śaṅkara, the six faiths were integrated to three—namely Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Śākta.

Buddhism, Jainism and Cārvāka reject the Vedas. They used to be called “Nāstika” schools. All three do not propose a God. Buddhism emphasizes on good conduct and behaviour. Jainism lays down vegetarianism, in addition to good conduct and behaviour, as the source to enlightenment.

The Cārvāka faith proposes the absence of sin and virtue, heaven and hell, enlightenment, liberation, God, rituals and righteousness. The word “Cārvāka” means “**one of sweet words**”. The Cārvāka faith posits that life and death are but chemical changes that appear and disappear with time. It claims that the human mind seeks pleasure without care of pain. Cārvāka system does not believe that austerity could be pleasurable. Cārvāka faith thus transmutes the human with six senses into an instinct-driven beast.

Varadarāja Pandit in his work “*Tarṅgīya rakṣa*” describes Cārvāka as those who only believe in that which can be physically

perceived.¹

In the Ayodhya Kāndā of Rāmāyaṇa, the sage Jābāli talks to Lord Rāmā about the “Nāstika” or the atheistic belief. Thus, it appears that sages established the basic tenets of the Cārvāka faith. However, such a phenomenon is the Almighty’s will to distract them from the righteous path. This can be inferred from the *Nammālvār’s Pāśuram*“.²

Throughout history, scholars and religious doyens have refuted the tenets of the Cārvāka faith. These scholars have based their arguments against the Cārvāka faith from the tenets of the Vedas.

Let us see how Viśiṣṭādvaita beliefs condemn Cārvāka and its teachings, with particular focus on Śrī Deśika’s views on these beliefs.

Kūrattāḷwan’s Rebuttal of Cārvāka beliefs

Kūrattāḷwan has established the tenets of “*para tattva*” or the “ultimate concept” in his work “*Śrī Vaikuṇṭhastava*”.

The *śloka* “Ājñā tvārtra bhavati.....”³ describes that in matters that cannot be overtly proven or understood by intuition, the Vedas alone should be considered as proof. Non-Vedic rituals embody falsifications and are invalid, despite their outward appearance of truth. Kūrattāḷwan refutes the assertion that the Vedas were the creation of a single person and argues that the timelessness of the Vedas disprove their origin from a single human, and this, in turn, makes them the ultimate truth. This is also why the Vedas are of sublime intelligence.

In the verse “*Antarhito...*”⁴, he propounds that the blessed among us, with faith in the Vedas, reach the Almighty and the non-believing Cārvārka-s lose themselves in meaningless, non-Vedic rituals. He calls them the unfortunate ones. He further declares that

the Lord is like the pot of gold hidden in the bowels of the earth, and the Vedas are the magic-ink that show its presence. The Lord shows Himself to the one that seeks Him through the Vedas. Likewise, those who do not subscribe to the Vedas will never become aware of the Almighty hidden right under their feet.

Rebuttal by Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭa

In the verse, “**Avayavi thaye.....**”⁵, Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭa clearly explains why Cārvārka is untenable.

Cārvārka adhikāri believe in the oneness of body and soul. The truth, however, is that while the organs of the body help in the operations of the body for a finite time and can be perceived by the sense organs, the soul is unperceivable by physical tools or appendages. It takes wisdom to perceive the soul. The body and soul, however, are often thought as being inseparable.

That the body and soul are different is understood from the ancient knowledge that actions lead to outcomes that can last over many lifetimes. The fact that good actions produce good outcomes and bad actions result in pain in the existing life and subsequent lifetimes shows that while the body can die, the soul remains eternal to enjoy or suffer the outcomes of the actions.

Therefore, the Cārvārka assertion of the only truth being that which is perceivable by the human sense organs, is erroneous.

In the verse “**Pratyakshā sruthi.... sa ha**”⁶, Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭa says that Cārvārka who speaks sweet enough to attract even an ordinary man should accept Vedas as a conclusive proof in the absence of perception as they (Cārvārka) can visualise things that are told in Vedas through Yogāsanas.

also sings the greatness of Śrī Rāmānuja in putting an end to the false dogma of Cārvārka. In his *śloka* that starts as “**Rāmānuja muni...**”⁷, he says the false dogmas that arose from the mischief of

the *Kali Puruṣa*, were chased out by Śrī Rāmānuja's *Hari bhakti*.

Rebuttal by Svāmi Deśika

Svāmi Deśika, the doyen and the upholder of the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy and tradition, after Śrī Rāmānuja, has provided detailed arguments refuting the idea of perception being the only truth, in his *Paramatabhaṅga*:

a. On perception and truth

In refuting the concept that “only those that can be perceived with the eyes are true and the concepts of righteousness, evil, God and netherworlds that cannot be seen with the eyes are not true”, he says the following:

“we must accept the words of the Vedas as true. When a learned one reads the Vedas and understands what it says, the matter that is being understood becomes true. Thus, even the Cārvārka who believe that what is perceived is true will agree that the perception that arises from the knowledge gained from the Vedas, about righteousness, evil, God and netherworld must be true”

Cārvārka may argue against this as “Vedas create illusion, which makes what is understood from them false”. This is wrong. An illusion can be generated only when what is said is erroneous. Nothing that the Vedas say is erroneous. Hence, Vedas do not produce illusion but true knowledge. Through the lines “**kaṇḍathu alāthathu...**”⁸, he proves that since the Vedas were not created by one person, its content is true.

Given that the Cārvārka consider what is seen (perceived) as being true due to its being error-free, they must accept that the Vedas are also beyond errors, and therefore true. He brings this out in the lines “**kaṇḍathu pol marai...**”⁹.

In the lines “**Uṇḍathu kettu ...**”¹⁰, he describes the Cārvārka's

belief of truth as that which can be physically perceived as being as ridiculous as one asking another person about the taste of food that he himself has eaten.

b. On intuition and belief

The fact that Cārvārka believe in the words of someone else who has perceived something, even though they themselves have not perceived it, like knowing of fire from smoke, even in the direct absence of the appearance of fire, shows that they believe in intuition in the absence of a physical proof.

They know that eating food will appease their hunger although there is no visible proof of the hunger being appeased.

They cite this as a reason to believe in unseen matter, which proves that they believe in intuition.

To the Cārvārka followers who deny the presence of a soul merely because they don't see it but accept the truth of the body because they can see it, he asks a pertinent question. When a baby is born, she drinks the milk from her mother's breast without being taught how to. If this is not knowledge learned in previous births, what else could it be? This is reason enough for them to accept that there dwells, an eternal soul, within the body.

Cārvārka which claims oneness of body and soul call their organs as their possessions, as "My body, my hand, my leg" thereby agreeing that the "I" is different from the body. By this, they contradict what they believe and what they say, and he condemns them in the hymn "*kandathanāl kānāthathu...*"¹¹ for not recognizing the truth.

Among Svāmi Deśika's "The miscellaneous truths" under "*Amṛtaranñjani*" the second hymn is "*Tattova Padavi*". In this Svāmi explains the wisdom of *Dharmabūta* as being the core of all soul, matter and intellect. By the *dharmabūtajnāna* alone can one attain

enlightenment, the joy of action and matter.

In the words of the Bhagavad Gītā that starts as “**Athiṣṭhānam tathā kartā**”¹², the word “kartā” or “doer of actions” must be interpreted as “one who performs actions by the grace of the Lord”. The verse indicates that one’s actions are the sole cause of the body, life, senses, mind, and feelings.

This refutes the Cārvāka’s argument that life, body, and thoughts are material things, and not an outcome of actions.

Śrī Deśika records some of his opinions on Cārvāka in such works as *Śrī Tattva Padavi* and *Śrī Tattva Navanīta*.

Śrī Tiruvaraṅgattamudhanār on Śrī Rāmānuja in the context of Cārvāka

In his 108 *ślokas* that sing the greatness of Śrī Rāmānuja, Śrī Tiruvaraṅgattamudhanār says that only with the birth of Śrī Rāmānuja did the false religions of Buddhism, Jainism and Cārvāka disappear, and the horrible Kali puruṣa died. (**Ānadhu semmai araneri.....**¹³)

By a mere glance, Śrī Rāmānuja destroyed these false dogmas, claims Śrī Amudhanār in the *pāśuram* “**Pārthān āru samayangal pathaippa**”¹⁴.

In another *cloak* “**nāttiya nīsa samayangal māndana**”¹⁵, Sri Amudhanār says that seeing Śrī Rāmānuja, these false dogmas died, and the Vedas that sing the greatness of Śrī Nārāyaṇa rejoiced.

In “**Kaithanan Theeya...**”¹⁶, he says that Śrī Rāmānuja corrected the fools who followed the false dogmas and showed the people the pure way of the Vedas.

Śrī Deśika on Śrī Rāmānuja in the context of Cārvāka

In his 74th *śloka* that eulogise the greatness of Śrī Rāmānuja, Śrī Deśika says that as Śrī Rāmānuja's Vedic tenets took hold, Buddhism fell, Sāṅkhya cult faded away, Vaiśeṣika was annihilated and Cārvāka disappeared from the face of the earth. (*Gātha tathagathanam galathi.....*¹⁷)

The utmost goal of Vedic philosophy that forms the basis of the Viśiṣṭdvaita belief system is the attainment of *mokṣa* or liberation of the individual self from the painful cycle of life and death, to the abode of Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, absolved of all action but performing *kainkarya* to the Lord (*Vaikuṅṭham puguvadhu mannavar vidiye...¹⁸, ozhivil kalamellām udanāi manni vazhuvilā adimai seiya vēndum nām...¹⁹*). The arguments of the *Śrīvaiṣṇavite* scholars against the nihilistic dogmas such as Cārvāka aim at the attainment of the highest good or *summum bonum* of our life. Śrī Rāmānuja is said to have opened the doors of Śrī *Vaikuṅṭha* to all the *jīvātmas* of this *prākṛta prapañca*.

References :

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- 2 Thiruvāimozhi 5.10.4 states *kalla vedatthai konu....*
- 3 Śrī *Vaikuṅṭhastava śloka* 11
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- 5 Śrī Raṅgarājastava *uttara ṣatka śloka* 4
- 6 *Sri Raṅgarājastava uttara ṣatka śloka* 5
- 7 Śrī Raṅgarājastava *pūrova ṣatka śloka* 3
- 8 *Paramatabhaṅga śloka* 12
- 9 *Paramatabhaṅga śloka* 12
- 10 *Paramatabhaṅga śloka* 12
- 11 *Paramatabhaṅga śloka* 13

- 12 *Bhagavad Gītā* 18-19
 13 *Rāmānuja Nūtrandāthi* 49
 14 *Rāmānuja Nūtrandāthi* 52
 15 *Rāmānuja Nūtrandāthi* 54
 16 *Rāmānuja Nūtrandāthi* 72
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