
The Unknown Sage's Well-known Thought: The Pleasure Philosophy of Carvaka

Shantaraj Debbarma

Asst. Professor of Philosophy

A M B S Mahavidyalaya, Amarpur, Tripura

e-mail: shantarajdebbarma@gmail.com

Abstract:

The most desirable object in this world is obviously the pleasure. There may be different views regarding the origin, nature and class of pleasure, but nobody can deny the pleasure. Pleasure is one of the basic things of our life, without this, human development is impossible. Man can get pleasure in anytime, anywhere, any form and from any object. There are levels of pleasure. As a social and rational being, we should not approve all kinds of pleasure. The definition of pleasure may be differing from person to person and community to community, but the real pleasure should be the one which brings pleasure not only for oneself but for all. And to attaining the pleasure, knowledge is required, avoiding the knowledge one cannot think about pleasure. Pleasure will automatically come out if one lives a life with honor, justice and wisdom. Justice resides there, where honor or respect is present and without wisdom justice is impossible. So we can say that to attain the pleasure and to staying in the warm of pleasure, wisdom is needed.

Key words: Pleasure, Pain, Ethics, Knowledge, Liberation

Introduction:

It is unclear and uncertain that from where the term 'Carvaka' is derived. There are many views regarding the term Carvaka. Some said that it comes from two Sanskrit words 'Caru' and 'Vak'. Caru means sweet or beauty and vak means word. So the literal meaning of Carvaka is sweet word or sweet tongued. Some said it is come from the Sanskrit word 'Carva' means eat or chew, because this philosophy hold the view of eat, drink and be merry. Again some said that it is the name of the pupil to whom the theory was discussed by the founder. So it is very difficult to say exactly from where the term is come. Another thing is that who was the founder of the Carvaka philosophy, it is undecided. Some says that it is the name of the sage who propounded this doctrine. Some writers said that the sage Brihaspati was the founder of this philosophy. In another view it is said that Carvaka is not proper name but a common name of those who believed in eat, drink and pleasure i.e. bodily or sensual pleasure. This philosophy is also known as Lokayata darshana and Indian materialism.¹

What did the Carvakas thought about the pleasure? How did the pleasure influence in our life? Why Carvaka give an important on the pleasure? What are the processes to acquire the pleasure? Is there any relevance of pleasure ethics in present days? These are the issues which has been tried to discuss in this paper. Life is one and after life what will happen we do not know, so it is better to enjoy this life as much as possible. Eat, drink and be merry. Past is death and future is unknown, we know only the present so enjoy this life. After death nothing will remain except ash. It is noteworthy that Carvaka did

¹ See S.C Chatterjee and D.M Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, pp. 52-53 & Jadunath Sinha, *Indian Philosophy* vol. 1, p. 257 & Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, p. 40

not deny the importance of knowledge and arts to achieving the pleasure. The ethical view of Carvaka is based on the pleasure.

And the pleasure ethics of Carvaka is based on their metaphysical theories. All the vedic school of Indian philosophy believed that liberation is the end of life. Liberation means to attain the heaven, freedom from suffering and some thinks that liberation is attained, when men's body is free from soul. A man gets pain or suffering because he has a body; body is the main cause of suffering. If the body did not exist, there will be no pain. But Carvakas hold the view that none of the above views are acceptable, because they think that there is no heaven or hell. Carvakas are believed in only perceptible object, since the heaven, hell and soul is imperceptible so they did not accept the existence of heaven and soul. Hence, 'the liberation means to attain the heaven' this view they did not accept.

The concept of heaven and hell is introduced by the opportunist priest:

Carvakas said that the concept of heaven and hell is introduced by the opportunist priests. Because by saying about hell and heaven they try to control over the general people and also coaxing and threatening to the general people for performing various unnecessary rituals. The happiness of heaven is a fable preached by the bluffer priests. Again there is no hell as suggested by the bluffer priest. Hell other than the bodily pain is non-existence. If there is anything which is hell then it is bodily pain and it is in this life, not after life.² For Carvakas, there is no soul apart from body, for them conscious body is the soul. 'Caitanya visista deha eva atma', the soul is the body endued with consciousness.³ And complete cessation from suffering is impossible in this life because body is bound with pain and pleasure. Liberation is possible only after death, 'Maranam eva apavargah'⁴

We cannot avoid the Pain & Pleasure:

We cannot avoid the pain, but we can minimize the amount of pain by accepting the reality i.e. knowing that our existence is possible only with body and we have to accept pleasure and pain because these two things are inseparable. A thing may give us pleasure at the particular time and at the particular circumstance. But may be that thing can give us pain at different time and circumstance. The feeling of pleasure and pain depend on the person, place and time. And a wise man is the man who gathers pleasure as much as he can by avoiding the pain.

Good Life is a Life of Full Enjoyment:

Carvakas said, only fools are reject the kernel because of its husk, reject the eating fish due to bones, do not cooking foods because beggars will come and do not sow seeds because of animals. A wise is a man who accept everything, he bring out tactfully the pleasure and move aside the pain. A good life is the life of full enjoyment; we should take every opportunities of enjoyment in this life. It is uncertain that after this life whether we will get another life or not. The past is dead and the future is uncertain. Only the present and perceptible is true, and in your hand, so enjoy the present life. After death nothing will exist, enjoy the pleasure as much as possible which are attainable from the worldly objects. Hence, it is not

² Jadunath Sinha, *Indian Philosophy* vol. 1, p. 275

³ Madhavacharya, *Sarvadarshana sangraha*, line taken from Jadunath Sinha, *Indian Philosophy* vol. 1, p. 271

⁴ Brihaspati sutra, taken from S.C Chatterjee and D.M Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, p. 61

wise to look over this life for uncertain after life. The present pigeon is good, rather than the delightful peacock of tomorrow.⁵

Pleasure is the measure of all things:

A good action is the action which brings pleasure and a bad action is which bring pain. The Carvaka concept of good and evil is based on the pleasure. And for them the pleasure is the highest good. The pleasures are arising from the embrace of woman, and that pleasure is the Purusharta, the desirable object of man.⁶ Pain and pleasure is mixed, the good thing is that to minimize the pain and maximize the pleasure as far as possible. There is no spiritual good, good is a mundane thing. The Carvakas deny the other worldly good. According to Carvaka pleasure is the ultimate goal of life. The virtue is the satisfaction of desire and it consists in the enjoyment of pleasure. Happiness derived from the appeasement of desire. In vedic Indian ethics four purusharthas are accepted viz. Artha (wealth), Kama (pleasure), Dharma (virtue) and Moksa (liberation). Out of these four Carvaka school of philosophy accepted only two Artha and Kama. Moreover Kama or pleasure is the ultimate end of life and artha or wealth is necessary for attaining the pleasure. Artha or wealth is the means to attaining the pleasure, and it is not goal or end in itself.⁷

Bodily and Spiritual both are Necessary for Good Life:

Vatsyayana, author of Kamasutra a recognized Indian hedonist suggested that along with the bodily pleasure man should pursue the mental pleasure by the way of acquiring catuh sasti kala or sixty four arts. He accepted the three desirable ends of human life or Purusharthas viz. Dharma (virtue), Artha (wealth) and Kama (pleasure), out of these three dharma, and artha is treated as the means of ultimate desirable end the pleasure. Again he also told that harmony of these three purushartha namely Dharma, Artha and Kama is very much necessary for good life. These three should be followed in harmony. Dharma, the social and spiritual discipline and Artha, the wealth is an instrumental end to achieve the ultimate end, the Kama or the pleasure.⁸ Vatsyayana believed that pleasure both bodily and spiritual is the only intrinsic value. Dharma and Artha are the instrumental value of achieving the pleasure or the Kama.

Bodily Pleasure Must Be Control by the Self, Social and Spiritual Discipline:

In addition to this Vatsyayana also said that bodily pleasure is very much necessary, because non satisfaction of bodily pleasure may lead to insanity. But that bodily pleasure must be control by the self, social and spiritual discipline. Without these the enjoyment will become a beastly enjoyment. Man is not only the biological animal, he is rational animal too. He has a capacity to develop the moral values; it can be transform the animal pleasure into the human pleasure by the urbanity and self control. The senses should be educated and cultured by the training of sixty four arts. The achievement of pleasure

⁵ S.C Chatterjee and D.M Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, p. 62 & Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, p. 46 & Jadunath Sinha, *Indian Philosophy* vol. 1, p. 277

⁶ Anganalinganadijanyam sukhameva purushartha said in *Sarvadarshana sangraha*, taken from Jadunath Sinha, *Indian Philosophy* vol. 1, p. 276

⁷ See Jadunath Sinha, *Indian Philosophy* vol. 1, p. 276 -77

⁸ S.C Chatterjee and D.M Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, pp.64-65 & Jadunath Sinha, *Indian Philosophy* vol. 1, p. 278-79

should be conformity with the society and Dharma. If the person did not sacrifice his or her pleasure for the society then it will be impossible to live a life in that society.⁹

Two Classes of Carvaka, Cunning and Cultured:

There is no doubt that Carvaka ethics is hedonistic ethics and they gives important to the sensual pleasure. However we have found the two classes of Carvakas viz. cunning and cultured. The cunning Carvakas are called cunning because they believed in gross sensual pleasure, they appeal to the general people that live a life with cheerful by eating and drinking and if necessary, takes the debt and eat the delicious food. While the cultured Carvakas along with the bodily pleasure, they accepted the pleasure of mind. They try to pursuit refined pleasure by cultivating fine arts.

Conclusion:

There is no doubt that the Carvaka School of philosophy give emphasize to the pleasure. And believed that pleasure is the ultimate goal of life. The following are the extract of their pleasure philosophy.

1. Carvaka holds the view that this world is created by numerous atoms. There is no teleological thing, atoms are accidentally conjugate to each other and produces the objects.
2. Pain and pleasure are mixed with one another. A wise man is he who avoids the pain and pick off the pleasure.
3. Carvaka believed in present life, they did not believed in after life or rebirth. That is why they said that enjoy the present life by eating, drinking and staying cheerful. After death nothing will remain, the death body will become argil or ash.
4. To overcome the fear is the most important thing to live a pleasant life. The Carvaka thinks that the opportunist priests are the main who create the fear in the mind of general people by introducing the idea of hell, social rituals, religion etc. the Carvaka said that only the fools are the person who rejects to eat fish, because there are bones. The wise men are capable to select the good one and accordingly live a pleasant life.
5. The Carvakas did not separate the higher or lower pleasure. For them all the pleasure is same, all the pleasure is bodily pleasure. But the cultured Carvakas namely Vatsyayana believed that along with bodily pleasure mental or psychological pleasure is required for happy life.
6. Carvaka believed that society is for individual, it has only instrumental value. Society is necessary only for to protect and enhance the individual.
7. Carvaka thinks that pleasure arise from the embrace of woman. However the cultured Carvakas like Vatsyayana thinks that the real pleasure comes out from sixty four arts (kala). And unrefined bodily pleasure should be checked by the self, social and spiritual discipline.

After the concise discussion on the above issue we are bound to say that pleasure is one of the fundamental things which are essential for the liberation. The delimitation of pleasure may be varies from person to person but the meaning of pleasure is same. Sometimes it may be happen that our pleasure can be decrease, if we always try to adjust private pleasure and social pleasure. So if we strictly follow the social norm, law, duty, dharma etc. we will surely get the social pleasure, but we may not be capable to achieve the private pleasure. Private pleasure is also most necessary thing for self

⁹ S.C Chatterjee and D.M Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, p. 66 & see also Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, p. 46-47

actualization and self expression. How a man will be happy, it depend on that man's thinking, his surrounding and his social life. Again these three influences each other, sometimes thinking affects surrounding and social life, sometimes surrounding affects to thinking and social life. And the society or the community also influence on our thinking. So how can a person will get pleasure, it depend on his/her social-surrounding and his/ her thinking.

The society is must for objective pleasure; else because of society a person cannot enjoy his/her private pleasure. Only he/she can enjoy private pleasure in the realm of his/her imagination. Men have to adjust their pleasure with the society or community. Hence the social men are enjoying the pleasure which is filtered by the society. Men cannot enjoy the pleasure which he/she really want. The society tells that what kind of pleasure you should desire or search. Finally, we have to say that a wise can live a pleasant life. And he is wise who know himself, who know his possibilities, his capacities, and his circumstances. And can act in accordance with these. Beside that he who can accept all activities keeping in mind that everything is I.

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