

Practice of Lokayata by Ruling Classes as Found in Epics

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ABSTRACT

The majority of Indian philosophical systems, including Buddhism and Jainism, have denounced Lokyata as a very primitive philosophy with no place in civilised society or deserving of praise. However, many contemporary scholars who studied Lokyata always approached it from a Marxist ideological perspective, only finding in it a school that was revolting against the spiritualism of the Vedic schools that were at the time active and even class conflict between the priest class and the common people. Since no complete original works from this school have been preserved to the present, it is challenging to understand its real flow of thought from the few, scattered comments and poems that have been attributed to it in the works of other schools. Modern researchers want us to assume that Lokyata reflects class strife and is opposed to spiritualism, but mediaeval philosophers depicted it unfavourably, stressing only its weak features, and even viewing its aphorisms as low and nasty. But how could it exist for over two millennia persuading every other school of thought if it was only a fundamental and laymen's ideology? As a result, the scholar has made an effort to learn about Lokayatyā's tenets and how they were used in the epics.

Keywords: Civilised Society, Philosophical Systems, Marxist Ideological, Spiritualism

INTRODUCTION

While the dharmashastras enjoined the observance of dharma on all sections of people, they also approved the pursuit of the other two goals, namely, artha and kama. The fault of Lokayatas, as perceived by the dharmashastras, the epics and the Bhagavadgita advocated the pursuit of artha and kama, but that they did so to the exclusion of dharma. When Shri Bhagawan condemned the Lokayatas in the Bhagavadgita for pursuing artha and kama, he did so in this true spirit of the dharmashastras and the epics. For throughout the Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Bhagavadgita, has found full theoretical justification for the pursuit of artha and kama by the ruling classes. So long as the ruling classes paid lip service to dharma, there was virtually no restraint on their pursuit of artha and kama.

With extensive evidence and reasoning, that the Brihaspati was the founder of both Lokayata philosophy and athashastra: that artha included both power and wealth, and that while the analytic aspect of Lokayata philosophy was based on an atheist epistemology and a materialist ontology, its social philosophy was embodied in Koutilya's Arthashastra and Vatsyayana's Kamasutra. While trying to establish, in other words, that while some Lokayata texts of analytic philosophy may have indeed been lost, the basic texts of its political and social philosophies are still extant though in a slightly camouflaged or interpolated form.

It may be noted, in this connection, that in the Brihaspati Sutra, which contains many Lokayata aphorisms in spite of heavy interpolations, Brihaspati advises his disciple, Indra, to accumulate both power and wealth, by fair means or foul, as does Kautilya in his Arthashastra. Similarly, Jayarashi in his Tattvopaplavasimha says, by way of conclusion at the very end of his book, that the pursuit of power and wealth is fully justified. Shankaracharya also says in his Sarvasiddhantasamgraha, that according to the Lokayata view, a wise man should be engaged in materialist pursuits like agriculture, cattle-breeding, commerce and politics. As is well known, a large number of authorities including Haribhadra Suri, Shankaracharya, Madhavacharya and Gunaratna have also observed that the pursuit of Kama is a central characteristic of Lokayata philosophy.

In this context, Somadeva Suri (10 century) has correctly observed that Lokayata is the real basis of operant behaviour of kings, and not dharma which is fit only for mendicants. He also says that his own Yashastikaka, like the nitis of Brihaspati, is based on atheism. His comentator, Shrutasaagara Suri, clearly and correctly identifies this atheism with both Lokayata and arthashastra, the last two, according to him, being also identical with each other. Our hypothesis, which is consistent with the views of Somadeva Suri, is that while the ruling classes in the epic period of ancient Indian history paid lip service to dharma, organized Vedic sacrifices for purely demonstrative purposes, and enforced the injunctions of the dharmashastras among the masses, in their behaviour life they were the time practitioners of Lokayata.

Statement of the Problem: Many textbooks use the terms "Cravka school" and "Lokayata school" interchangeably and refer to them as both "nistika" and "nirishwaravdi" schools. They assert that materialism, as it was defined in Greek philosophy or as it is known in the contemporary world, was common in ancient times and that texts like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata rejected and opposed the Cravka school of thought. Additionally, Lokyata is portrayed as a hedonistic philosophy, and sometimes, its doctrines are even painted as condoning unethical behaviour. However, they fail to explain why such a simple and allegedly immoral philosophy drew the attention of all the great thinkers throughout history, or why every school spent so much time disputing such a philosophy. Before the true principles of Lokyata and their importance are examined in the appropriate light, it is important for such misunderstandings to be eliminated.

Objectives: The main objectives of this study are as follows-

- To study the principle of Pursuit of power as depicted in the epics

- To study the principle of Pursuit of wealth as depicted in the epics
- To study the principle of Pursuit of sexuality as depicted in the epics

Pursuit of Power

In the Brihaspati Sutra, Brihaspati forbids Indra to study the Vedas, perform sacrifices or go on pilgrimages. At the same time he advises Indra to follow the Lokayata Shastra by all means for the pursuit of artha and the Kapalika path for the pursuit of Kama. The distinction made here between the Lokayatas and the Kapalikas with regard to kama was not made by commentators of Lokayata like Haribhadra, Madhavacharya and Gunaratna, and may be ignored for our present purpose, since the Lokayatas have always openly advocated the pursuit of both artha and kama. So, for the pursuit of artha, consisting of power and wealth, is concerned. The relevant political philosophy of Lokayata has been enunciated in the Arthashastra of Kautilya, a follower of Brihaspati, which was intended to be a political manual not only for kings, but for the landed aristocracy in general. Its central principle that happiness or pleasure is the ultimate goal is merely an extension of the Lokayata maxim of the pursuit of pleasure into the political sphere. Moreover, the free sanction of expediency, that is to say, the application of disingenuous means in niti or politics without the slightest concern for conventional morality for the attainment of happiness by the swami, is also merely a political application of the philosophical rejection of virtue and vice, and hence of morality in social life, as preached by Lokayata. This indeed is the kind of political behaviour which we find reflected in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, particularly the latter.

As a matter of fact, not only are there numerous instances of invoking the authority of Brihaspati for justifying amoral political behaviour throughout the Mahabharata, but one whole chapter of the Shanti Parva is devoted to Brihaspati's views on the treatment of political opponents. In his long discourse to Indra, which is approvingly narrated by Bhishma to Yudhishtira, Brihaspati tells his disciple, inter alia, that one's true intentions must always be kept secret from enemies who should be constantly deceived by pleasant behaviour until the right moment comes to strike them down. Once vanquished, the enemy must be completely destroyed, so that he never see again. An intelligent person must always cultivate the company of his opponent with the double purpose of winning his trust and finding out his vulnerable spots until he is able to strike the latter down. When the right time comes the enemy the opportunity must never be missed. If an enemy powerful, one should placate him by prostrating oneself before him, making monetary gifts, and speaking sweet words to him until, in his moment of carelessness, he can be killed. Deception and subterfuge should be constantly used for defeating and destroying the enemy, and so on. Bhishma says that Indra had vanquished the enemies of the gods by putting Brihaspati's precepts into practice.

The recognition of the unbridled sovereignty of the king, and his right to maximize his pleasure through the politics of amoral expediency follow logically from the political philosophy of Lokayata. Since the Lokayatas did not recognize the existence of God or gods, there could be no supraterritorial authority to control the behaviour of the king. The aphorism of Brihaspati, as quoted by Madhavacharya, sums up the Lokayata position in this

respect. "A king is the absolute miter of people on earth, and there is no divine power above him." Nor did the Lokayatas develop any secular theory of human rights or of political resistance against the power of an unjust ruler. Scholars are in fact generally agreed that the Lokayatas took particular care to be on the right side of the rulers and not to oppose directly any of their unjust laws and injunctions. Jabali's radical change of stance after being rebuked by Rama is a typical instance in point. The slight compromise with the dharmashastras visible in the Arthashastra and the Kamasutra may also have been prompted by expediency generated by the instinct of self-preservation. The logical consequence of this line of political thinking was the recognition of the unrestrained sovereignty of kings. Consistent with the Lokayata maxim of the nonexistence of virtue or vice, and hence of ethical norms for the regulation of human conduct, the unmitigated sovereignty of the rulers also implied a rationalization of the pursuit of amoral politics by them with a view to the maximization of their own pleasure, and to controlling the lives of the people in any manner they liked. The practice of amoral politics for the sake of the power and happiness of the rulers, as found in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, thus appears to be a true application of the political philosophy of Lokayata.

Pursuit of Wealth

Needless to say, the other division of arthashastra, namely, artha or the Science of wealth was also a major facet of the social philosophy of Lokayata, and it is found in the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Of course, the pursuit of wealth was considered to be a legitimate activity for all the three twice-born varnas (the Shudras, constituting the great majority of the population, having been debarred from it) in mainstream Brahminism, as distinguished from the somewhat peripheral Upanishadic tradition of renunciation. But the Lokayatas, being opposed to dharma on philosophical grounds, particularly emphasized artha along with the other secular goal of kama. The Brihaspati Sutra, which calls itself also the Brahapatya Arthashastra, says Wealth should be acquired. Whoever has wealth also has friends, religion, learning, character, power and intelligence. Poverty cannot beget wealth any more than an elephant can be tamed except with the help of another elephant. The whole world is based on wealth. Everything resides in it. A poor man is a dead man and like a chandala (untouchable).

It is this candid exposition of the social philosophy of Lokayata which we find reflected in the existential behaviour of the ruling classes in the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The comparison of a dead man with a chandala or untouchable reflects the inhuman sufferings of the low castes under Brahminical repression perpetrated through the state, which is also equally manifest in the two epics.

In the Ramayana we find a description of the wealth of Ayodhya, as well as of the palaces of Dasharath and Ravana. Rama was brought up in great luxury, and went into forest-exile not as an act of renunciation, but because he was unwilling to violate the injunction of the dharmashastras regarding the mandatory subservience of a son to the wishes of his father. He does not disagree with Lakshmana, either at Ayodhya or later on in the forest when the latter emphasizes the importance of kingdom and wealth as prerequisites of happiness, but expresses his inability to disobey his father. In an episode during the war in Lanka, Lakshmana gives a lengthy discourse to Rama on the fundamental importance of wealth in human life, and Rama's folly in giving up his

kingdom. He observes, almost in the language of Brihaspati. that only a wealthy man is capable of performing religious observances, and therefore, dharma itself is dependent on wealth. All acts of a man without wealth dry up like a river in summer. One who seeks pleasure without wealth is forced to commit crimes. Hence wealth is the only true goal of life. Whoever has wealth also has friends and allies, and is regarded as the most virtuous. Only a wealthy man can pursue dharma and kama, and every circumstance turns out to be favourable for him. A man without wealth must exert himself to acquire wealth. On his return to Ayodhya, Rama is pleased to be informed by Bharata that during his exile the latter, as his trustee, had multiplied his wealth tenfold. He then returns to a life of luxury and pleasure, punctuated only by the performance of numerous costly sacrifices involving massive gifts to the Brahmins, and listening to endless discourses on the teachings of the *Arthashastra*. During this period he also beheads Shambuka, a shudra for daring to perform suterities which are forbidden to the caste by the *Dharmashastra*.

As the war of Kurukshetra was about to begin, Sanjaya, the clairvoyant wise man of the Mahabharata, explained the true objective of both the sides to Dhritarashtra. He first theorized, in language closely resembling that of Kautilya's *Arthashastra* (which is admittedly based on the views of Brihaspati) "Whoever owns land controls the world of both living beings and inanimate objects. Hence kings tend to develop extreme greed for land, and often destroy one another in the process." Placing this general theoretical observation in the context of the Kurukshetra war, he said: "Just as dogs fight over a piece of meat, so also kings fight among themselves for the enjoyment of the earth. The enjoyment of wealth has not so far produced final satisfaction in any age. That is why the Kauravas and the Pandavas have been struggling for the acquisition of land through the fourfold policy of peaceful diplomacy, making of gifts, sowing of dissension and war."

Pursuit of Sexual Pleasure

In addition to artha, consisting of power and wealth, the other varga with which Lokayata philosophy is traditionally associated is kama or sexual pleasure; and the pursuit of kama is also a central characteristic of the behaviour-pattern of the ruling classes in both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. In fact a grand obsession with kama is rationalized as well as glorified in the two epics. Brahma, the Creator, grew four faces with eight eyes in order to watch the apsara *tilotama*, who was dancing around him, without alerting his wife who was seated on his lap, Indra, the king of the gods, is a famous *parndarika* abductor who is proudly promiscuous and always lying in wait for both heavenly and earthly damsels, although he has a devout wife, Shachi, at home. His guru Brihaspati apparently approves of his amorous pursuits. Most of the renowned sages are also found to indulge in almost unrestrained and promiscuous sex, without any apparent diminution of their sainthood. The birth of children, particularly sons, through sexual union of wives with men other than their husbands is also quite common. It is also found that numerous instances of large numbers of young and pretty women changing hands among Kshatriyas or between Kshatriyas and Brahmins. There are also numerous references to the existence of harems, palace prostitution, household prostitution and public prostitution.

The Ramayana tells us that the birth of all the monkeys who fought on the side of Rama, the incarnations of Clod, was the result of indiscriminate sex, including bestiality, on the part

of the gods who had been ordered by the Self-Created Supreme Lord to unite with the *gandharis*, *apsaras*, *vilyadorn* and female monkeys for the purpose. It is told that the holy Ganga and *karikeys*, commander-in-chief of the heavenly hosts as well as gold was born out of the intermixture of Shiva, the Supreme Deity, with his wife, Parvati, which had tended to become interminable and hence awakened the fear of the gods. We also learn that Dasharatha had a harem of three hundred and fifty wives, in addition to his three principal wives. Dasharatha, nevertheless, was so mesmerized by his passion for Kaikeyi that he swore to be totally ruthless at her command, and ordered the banishment of Rama and the coronation of Bharata according to her wishes. It is also found that Dasharatha ordered the ministers of his own palace to assemble in the second chamber of the palace on the occasion of the aborted coronation. *Baca Positiones* atop line up in the straits of Ayodhya to man the journey of Rama into forest exile. Among other such as is a human description of Ravana's harem might as witnessed by Hanuman.

In the Mahabharata we find that Krishna, the incarnation of God, had about a dozen principal wives, and sixteen thousand others. One of his wives, Rukmini, complained to Draupadi about his lack of attention towards her, and asked her how she managed to retain the affection of her five husbands. Each of the Pandavas had more than one wife, while Draupadi was shared by all of them, because, as the Mahabharata tells us the carnal desire of all the five brothers had been visibly and equally aroused by the first sight of Draupadi. The epic also highlights the widespread prevalence of prostitution, particularly among the ruling classes. Bhima chastises Yudhishtira by saying that decent people do not even use their household prostitutes as stake in dice, not to speak of their own wives, and threatens to bum his hands. Yudhishtira asks a messenger to convey his good wishes to the prostitutes of the Kaurava palace. He also inspects the camp of prostitutes on his own side in the eve of the Kurukshetra war. Kama declares on the battlefield that he would make a gift of seven sillas of prostitutes to anyone who could locate Arjuna for him. Numerous other such instances can be picked up from both the epics, particularly the Mahabharata, to show that the pursuit of kama was not only regarded as legitimate but also glorified by the ruling classes in the epic period of Indian history.

Conclusion: An attempt seems to have been made in later Vaishnava religion and culture to retain these Lokayata practices in an apparently sublimated form. It may be remembered in this connection that the Lokayatas took shelter among Mahayana Buddhists, Kapalikas, Sahajiyas and other Vaishnava sects in the middle ages, in the face of the ruthless persecution by the state and the ruling classes. The present-day festival of holi appears to be a residual continuation of the ancient Lokayata practice of group kama which was widely practised by the ruling classes in the epic period.

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