



Materialism

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For Prelims: Materialism, Lokāyata, Chárváka, Bhautikvad, and Jadavāda, Material nature of existence, Atomism of Democritus and Epicurus

For Mains: Materialism, Contributions of Moral Thinkers and Philosophers from India and World

Why in News?

Materialism, traced back to ancient origins, provides a coherent framework that centers on **matter** as the basis of existence.

What is Materialism?

▪ About:

- Materialism asserts that all **existence originates from and is fundamentally composed of matter**.
- It **refutes the existence of non-material entities**, considering all other phenomena, even intelligence, as transformations or products of matter following inherent natural laws.

▪ Historical Context:

- Materialism has roots in ancient philosophies worldwide. In India, it found expression in **Lokāyata, Chárváka, Bhautikvad, and Jadavāda**, among other names.
 - Lokāyata, meaning the philosophy of the people, emphasizes worldliness and instinctive materialism. Lokāyata was pioneered by **philosophers like Brhaspati, Ajita, and Jābāli**.
 - **Chárváka highlights hedonism**, the belief that pleasure is the most important thing in life.
 - Bhautikvad focuses on the **physical or material nature of existence**.
 - Jadavāda reflects the materialists' inclination to seek the material roots of existence.
- Early Greek philosophers also **pursued materialistic explanations for the cosmos**, notably through the **atomism of Democritus and Epicurus**.
- Various names in different cultures signify materialist philosophies.

▪ Evolution of Thought:

- Ancient materialists pondered the four classical elements (Mahābhūtas) and explained reality's diversity through 'svabhāva' or self-becoming.
 - The four fundamental elements were considered to be agni (fire), apa (water), vāyu (wind) and prthvī (earth).
- They rejected divine providence and **denied the existence of any world beyond the singular**, observable reality, meaning they didn't believe in a higher power guiding events or the universe's destiny.
- They also denied the **existence of any world beyond what could be directly observed** or experienced, emphasizing the importance of empirical reality as the sole

reality.

▪ **Ethics of Materialism:**

- The ethics of materialism did face criticism for allegedly **promoting a hedonistic lifestyle**, as reflected in the Sanskrit dictum “**yāvat jīvēt sukham jīvēt,**” which means “**as long as you live, live happily**”.
- Materialism **did not accept any moral or ethical principles** that were derived from religious or metaphysical doctrines.
- Materialism did not deny the existence of ethics, but rather argued that ethics **should be based on human reason and experience**, and that the goal of ethics should be the maximization of pleasure and the minimization of pain for oneself and others.

What is the Philosophical Significance of Materialism?

- Materialism offers a comprehensive worldview that emphasizes empirical observation and **natural laws governing existence**.
- It **challenges religious dogma** and encourages a critical examination of reality based on tangible, observable phenomena.
- It advocated for **freedom of thought, challenging societal norms and conventions**.
- Despite shifts in dominant philosophies over time, materialist ideas persist and continue to shape contemporary scientific inquiry, particularly in understanding the fundamental nature of reality.
- Its influence spans cultures and epochs, encouraging a rational exploration of the **universe and rejecting supernatural explanations** in favor of empirical observation and understanding.

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