

# THE ANTIQUITY OF THE SŪTRAKṚTĀṄGA IN LIGHT OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHICAL LITERATURE

Reshma Bhansali<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE can be considered the golden age of Indian Philosophy. This period saw the rise of the Śramaṇa tradition and Upaniṣad wisdom. Jainism and Buddhism rose to challenge the Vedic hegemony and were very successful in bringing about social changes. For the next few centuries, the Śramaṇa philosophy spread through the length and breadth of the Indian subcontinent. The downfall was so dramatic that Buddhism was wiped out from the country of its origin and Jainism was considered as an offshoot of Hinduism. The revival of Jain philosophy started in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when most of their texts were discovered, studied, and translated. These texts are a treasure house of information on the ancient philosophical environment. The evolution of the Vedic schools from the lens of the Śramaṇa tradition adds another dimension to the study of *āgamas* and Tripiṭikas. The importance of the *śramaṇa* thought in developing Indian philosophical thought is irrefutable. The *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* along with Buddhist Tripiṭikas highlight the same. The objective of this paper is to establish the Historicity of the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga Sūtra* which in turn establishes the antiquity of Jain *āgamas*.

## Introduction

Scriptures, in general, are a significant source of history as they provide invaluable insights into the cultural and social setup prevalent during those times. The Jain *āgamas* also have the same narration style discussing many social, political, and philosophical concepts. In *Upāsakadaśāṅga Sūtra*, we find the description of the wealth and living conditions of the ten *śrāvakas*. In the *Bhagavatī Sūtra* descriptions of gardens and towns, are found. In the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga Sūtra* (1.1-2) we find the description and refutations of various schools prevalent during the times of Tīrthaṅkara Mahāvīra. Interestingly in all the discussions, we do not find any mention of the six *darśanas* which have come to define Indian philosophy as we know it today. The pertinent question is why there is no mention of the six *darśanas* in the scriptures. Later, based on the vivid description found in the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, the commentators have ascribed the six *darśanas* they deemed most befitting. For example, the *pañca-bhūta-vāda*, *tajjīva-taccharīra-vāda*, and *ātmaśaṣṭha-vāda* come under the materialist philosophy of Cārvāka in the commentary literature. Buddhism and *kṣaṇika-vāda* share similar thought patterns. In *The Sacred Books of the East*, Max Muller equated *ekātma-vāda* with Vedānta and *akriyā-vāda* with Sāṃkhya philosophy (Muller 237). The *Śāstravārtā Samuccaya* shows the relation between the principles and their respective philosophies in the following way (Shah 14):

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<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Jainology, SSS Shasun Jain College for Women, Chennai.  
Email: [reshmabhansali98@gmail.com](mailto:reshmabhansali98@gmail.com)

- *Bhautika-vāda* with Cārvāka or Lokāyata tradition
- *Īśvara-vāda* with Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika tradition
- *Prakṛti-Purūṣa-vāda* with Sāṃkhya tradition
- *Kṣaṇika-vāda* with Sautrāntika Buddhism
- *Śūnya-vāda* with Mādhyamika Buddhism
- *Nityānityatva-vāda* with Jainism
- *Brahmādvaita-vāda* with Advaita Vedānta tradition
- *Sarvajñatā-pratiśedha-vāda* with Mīmāṃsā tradition

Here it elaborates the specific philosophies of the respective schools of thoughts.

Moreover, such was the high esteem and respect in which the later writers held the *sūtra* writers, that whenever they had any new speculation to offer, these were reconciled with the doctrines of one or other of the existing systems and put down as faithful interpretation of the system in the form of commentaries.

This paper will look at various Vedic and non-Vedic sources to understand the antiquity of the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*. Even when we look at the Buddhist texts, we find little or no reference to the six *darśanas* in them. Description of various schools is given in terms of individual interaction with Buddha. Buddhist texts carry a reference to sixty-two divisions of *akriyā-vāda*, while the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* mentions 84 types of *akriyā-vāda* with a similarity in the style of narration. Both texts also mention Vedic and non-Vedic teachers.

### **Buddhist Texts**

We find a similar reference in Buddhist texts about the various schools mentioned in the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*. In the *Majjhima Nikāya*, we find mention of ‘six heretical teachers who are considered contemporary to Gautam Buddha. They are: Purāṇa Kaśyapa, Makkhali Gośālaka, Ajīta Keśakambala, Pakudha Kaccāyana, Sanjay Belatṭhiputta and Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta (Bodhi 621). These philosophers propounded their schools of thought and were quite popular. The *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* also mentions the schools of thought propounded by these teachers. Ajīta Keśakambala is believed to have propagated Materialism (Sharma 29), Purāṇa Kaśyapa was characterized as *akriyā-vādin*; A similar reference in *The Sacred Books of the East* states, “in *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, two materialistic theories which have much in common are spoken of” (Muller 23). The first passage believes that those who contend that the body and the soul are identical. The second passage is concerned with the doctrine that the five elements are eternal and constitute everything. The adherents of either philosophy maintain that it is no sin to kill living beings. Similar opinions in the *Samaññaphala Sutta* are ascribed to Purāṇa Kaśyapa and Ajīta Keśakambala (Muller 23). *Niyati-vāda* was attributed to Makkhali Gośālaka; Sanjay Belatṭhiputta proliferated the doctrine of *ajñāna-vāda*; Pakudha Kaccāyana promoted the philosophy of materialism through morality point of view, and it can be considered as *akriyā-vāda*.

In his book, *The Two Sources of Indian Asceticism*, Johannes Bronkhorst states that the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* dates from the 2<sup>nd</sup> BCE at the very earliest, based on how it references the Buddhist theory of momentariness, which is a later scholastic development (Bronkhorst 97). For accurate determination of the antiquity of the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, one also needs to look at the development of the Vedas as the Vedic and Śramaṇa streams of thought developed parallelly.

### Development of the Vedas

The Vedas are believed to be *apauruṣeya* (not made by humans). To put an exact date on when it was systematized is highly improbable; by studying language and content, only one has come closer to the composition date. “The Vedas is a series of such voluminous works put together by generations of poets – in fact, a library that was in the making for years – and between its oldest portions and the newest lies a distance of more than at least half a dozen centuries” (Belvalkar and Ranade 1-2). M. Winternitz, in his book, *A History of Indian Literature*, explaining the chronology of Indian literature, asserts that the Buddhist literature presupposes the Vedic literature and he also talks about the trustworthiness of the Buddhist and Jain scriptures (Winternitz 27). The composition dates of the Vedas and Upaniṣads are still being determined; There is no definite date or period assigned to the Upaniṣads. The problem is complicated by the “almost total lack of definite chronological data either in the old or the new Veda” (Belvalkar and Ranade 2). Surendranath Dasgupta believes that “it is very probable that the earliest part of Upaniṣadic literature is as old as 500 BCE to 700 BCE” (Dasgupta 7). Broadly, “the timeline of the development of Indian philosophical schools can be classified into four different periods” (Radhakrishnan and Moore xvi-xviii):

- **The Vedic period approximately between 2500 BCE– 600 BCE:** During this period, the expansion of the Vedas (*R̥g*, *Yajur*, *Sāma*, and *Atharva*) and their four parts (the *mantras*, *brāhmaṇas*, *āranyakas*, and *upanīṣads*) took place. The gradual shift from polytheism to a monist tradition of the Upaniṣads was the hallmark of this period.
- **The Epic period was approximately between 600/500 BCE–200 CE:** Deliberations on philosophical principles characterized the Epic Period through the medium of non-systematic and non-technical literature (Radhakrishnan and Moore xxi). This period saw the evolution of the Heterodox schools and the composition of Mahabharata and Ramayana. The early stages of the orthodox schools also belong to this period.
- **The Sūtra period from 200 CE:** The *sūtra* period is dated from the early centuries of the Christian era. In this period, the systematic treatise of various schools was written, and the systems took the basic form they were to pursue henceforth (Radhakrishnan and Moore xvii). The six orthodox schools were presented in the *sūtra* form during this period. “For centuries, the philosophical thought developed in India till, at last, it became so unwieldy that a regular systematization of each school of thought was found a great necessity. This led to *sūtra* literature” (Vireswarananda iii-iv). It suggests that the systematization of the six philosophies happened during the *sūtra* period indicating that the six schools developed much later than *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*. Elaborating on the *sūtra* period, it is said, “Various *sūtras* were taken as authoritative and foundational for numerous schools of Indian thought,

which devoted further commentaries to the *sūtras*. At this time, we see numerous intellectual traditions emerge: Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta, and Cārvāka” (Age of the Sutras).

- **The scholastic period till the 17<sup>th</sup> CE:** This period witnessed the flourishing of commentary literature. Exhaustive explanations of the *sūtras* are found. It must be noted that all early Indian systems grew parallelly, and all these schools existed in some form or the other from a very early period.

One more thing to note is that earlier, both the systems (orthodox and heterodox) followed the *smṛti* and *śruti* way of learning. The four Vedas (*Rg*, *Sāma*, *Yajur*, and *Atharva*), Brahmanas, and the Upaniṣads are part of the *śruti* tradition. While the *vedāṅgas*, *dharma śāstras*, laws of Manu, epics of *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, the six *darśanas*, and *tantras* are part of the *smṛti* tradition (Noss and Grangaard 105). So, the oral tradition was common to all Indian schools, and it was during later periods that a shift from oral tradition to written was followed making it very difficult to trace the origins of all the systems.

Next, we look at the brief outline of the schools of Indian philosophy. Chandradhar Sharma gives a chronological order of the development of Indian philosophy which suggests that the six *darśanas* developed last in the Vedic literature (Sharma vi):

### Schools of Indian philosophy

Swami Vireswarananda in his Brahma Sutra states, “The destructive criticism of the old system by the Cārvāka and others set the orthodox section to organize their beliefs in a more rationalistic basis and render it immune against all such criticism. This led to the foundation of the six systems of orthodox Hindu system” (Vireswarananda iii).

Most scholars believe that Tīrthānkara Mahāvīra belonged to the 5<sup>th</sup> BCE. Perhaps during his time, the six schools were not as systematized as we know them today. Interestingly, the prior forms of the six schools are mentioned in the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*. A study of the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* is vital to understanding the development of the Indian philosophical systems from a *Śramanic* perspective. There must have existed a period of transition from the Vedas and Upaniṣads to these six philosophical schools since these schools have their beginnings in them. In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, while discussing the various subjects for study, the term *vākovākya* is used to denote discussions or debates.<sup>2</sup> The term *ānvīkṣikī* is used in *artha śāstras* to denote philosophical knowledge and under *ānvīkṣikī* schools Sāṃkhya, Yoga, and Lokāyata are mentioned. In the *Yājñavalkya Smṛti*, while describing the fourteen sources of Dharma, we find mention of Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā thoughts.<sup>3</sup> Thus, we see the Vedas and Upaniṣads do not mention the six *darśanas* in a definite order.

<sup>2</sup> “Rgvedaṃ bhagavo'dhyemi yajurvedaṃ sāmavedamātharvaṇaṃ caturthamitiḥāsapurāṇaṃ pañcamam vedānām vedaṃ pitryaṃ rāśiṃ daivaṃ nidhiṃ vākovākyaṃekāyanaṃ devavidyāṃ brahmavidyāṃ bhūtavidyāṃ kṣatratridyāṃ nakṣatratridyāṃ sarpadevajanaividyaṃmetadbhagavo'dhyemi” (Chāndogya Upaniṣad 7.1.2)

<sup>3</sup> *purāṇanyāyamīmāṃsādharmaśāstrāṅgamiśritāḥ* |

An impartial study of the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* will help one understand the transition process as the rudimentary forms of philosophical thoughts are evident in it. The development of Jain scriptures coincided with the development of the Upaniṣads. The earliest Upaniṣads were compiled by 500 BCE, they continued to be written even so late as the spread of Mahomedan influence in India (Dasgupta 39). The Jain school also saw the transition from Tīrthamkara Parśvanātha to Tīrthamkara Mahāvīra, from *caturdharma* to *pañca-vratas*, suggestive of continuous redefining and refining as the norm of all traditions.

It can be argued that the *āgamas* were scripted a thousand years after the liberation of Mahāvīra hence its authentication can be questioned. The study of language has proved that the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*, along with the first *Śrutaskandha* of the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, is comparatively older than other *āgamas* and the later Jain *ācāryas* tried to preserve the originality of these texts to the best of their abilities. The fact that the six *darśanas* do not find any mention in the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* throws light on its antiquity. In the preface of *Ṣaḍdarśana Samuccaya*, Dalsukh Malvaniya mentions that one cannot, with certain assurance, pinpoint the accurate time the various philosophical schools were categorized into six in number. On the question of why there are only six *darśanas*, Haribhadra states that since the classification of the six *darśanas* is based on *tattvas* and causal factors, the major schools are only six. Bauddha, Nyāya, Sāṃkhya, Jain, Vaiśeṣika, and Mīmāṃsā are considered as six philosophies.<sup>4</sup> Though it is difficult to ascertain anything with definiteness, the study of the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, along with other Buddhist texts, helps us draw a more comprehensive picture of philosophical thought in India. According to Matilal, during the *śramaṇa* (post-Upaniṣadic) period of Indian philosophy, the intellectual climate was brisk, critical, and controversial (Matilal 9). The *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* seems to have followed the norm of the times of its contemporaries.

### Historical figures in Sūtrakṛtāṅga Sūtra

We find mention of characters like Nami of Videha, Rāmaputta, Bāhuka, Nārāyaṇa, Āsita Devala Rṣi, Maharṣi Dvaipāyana and Parāśara attained liberation.<sup>5</sup> We find these names in other Jain as well as non-Jain texts.

- **Nami:** Nami of Videha is mentioned in both Buddhist and Vedic texts. The ninth chapter of *Uttarādhyayana Sūtra* is devoted to Nami Rājarṣi of Mithilā (Videha) and is considered *pratyeka buddha* or *svayaṃ sambuddha*<sup>6</sup>, and in the Buddhist Jākata tales, also similar reference is found. Finding the world full of suffering, Nami renounced and became a *pratyeka buddha* (Appleton and Shaw 85). In the ‘Anuśāsana Parva’ of

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*vedāḥ sthānāni vidyānām dharmasya ca caturdaśaḥ* || (Yājñavalkyasmṛti 1.3)

<sup>4</sup> *darśanāni ṣaḍevātra mūlabhedavyapekṣayā | devatātatvabhedenā jñātavyāni maṇṣibhiḥ | bauddham naiyāyikam sāmkyam jainam vaiśeṣikam tathā | jaiminīyam ca nāmāni darśanānāmamuñyaho* || (Ṣaḍdarśana Samuccaya 2-3)

<sup>5</sup> *abhuñjīyā namī vedehī, rāyagupte ya bhūñjīyā | bāhuta udagam bhocā tahā tārāgaṇe risī || āsile devile ceva, dīvāyaṇa mahārisī | pārāsare dagam bhocā, bīyāṇi hariyāṇi ya ||* (Sūtrakṛtāṅgasūtra 1.3.4.2-3)

<sup>6</sup> *jāim sarittu bhayavam sahasambuddho aṇuttare dhamme | puttam thavettu rajje abhiñikkhamā namī rāyā* || (Uttarādhyayanasūtra 9.2)

*Mahābhārata*, we find mention of Nami as a great king who has never tasted meat (Mahābhārat- Anuśāsana Prva 116.67-70). We also find another mention of Nami as a great saint and the son of Ṛṣi Dattātreyā.<sup>7</sup>

- **Rāmaputta:** Another character is Rāmaputta; though some texts mention him as Rāmagupta, Dr. Sagarmal Jain, in the *Aspects of Jainology*, states that it is Rāmaputta and not Rāmagupta. He associates Rāmaputta mentioned in the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* and the one mentioned in Buddhist texts as the same. In the Buddhist text, he is mentioned as Udaka Rāmaputta, the first teacher of Gautam Buddha. He learned meditation from him. The *Ṛṣibhāṣita* (4<sup>th</sup> century) also mentions Rāmaputta as a great scholar and teacher. The *Sthānāṅga* and the *Anuttaropapātika* also refer to Rāmaputta as a historical character. (Jain 1988: 48-49)
- **Bāhuka:** Bāhuka is also mentioned in *Ṛṣibhāṣita* as a *śramana* ascetic not belonging to any *śramana* school (Jain 1988: 48). In the Buddhist text, there is a reference to Bāhiya Dāruccīriya, a disciple of Gautam Buddha whose teachings resemble that of Bāhuka mentioned in *Ṛṣibhāṣita* (Malalasekera 1938: 281).
- **Nārāyaṇa:** Nārāyaṇa is given great reverence in *Ṛṣibhāṣita* as a great ascetic who achieved liberation (Jain 1988: 65-66). In the Vedic tradition, Nārāyaṇa is referred to as a God (The Mahabharata 1.85). In the 334<sup>th</sup> chapter of Śānti Parva, Nārāyaṇa having a dialogue with Nārada is also found. Though we find the name Nārāyaṇa mentioned in many Vedic texts, we cannot with certainty say if both are the same figure. Another research is required for this.
- **Āsita Devala:** Buddhist, Vedic, and Jain texts portray Āsita Devala as a distinguished scholar and ascetic. Both *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*<sup>8</sup> and *Ṛṣibhāṣita* acknowledge that Āsita Devala attained liberation (Jain 1988: 48). The *Majjhima Nikāya* dedicates an entire chapter to him titled the ‘Assalāyana Sutta’. Āsita is also mentioned in the *Indriya Jātaka* as the elder brother of Nārada (Malalasekera 1937: 210). He preached detachment to his pupils. A similar reference to Asita Devala is found in the 275<sup>th</sup> chapter of *Mahābhārata* where, too, he advises Nārada against worldly bondage. He is shown as an old ascetic performing rigorous penance.
- **Sage Dvaipāyana:** Sage Dvaipāyana is mentioned in many Jain texts including *Samavāyāṅga*,<sup>9</sup> *Antakṛddasāṅga*,<sup>10</sup> *Aupapātika*,<sup>11</sup> and *Ṛṣibhāṣita* (Jain 1988: 71-72). Dvaipāyana enjoys a significant position in the Vedic tradition. He is known as the

<sup>7</sup> *dattatreyasya putro'bhūnnimirnāma tapodhanah | nimeścāpyabhavatputrah śrīmānnāma śriyāvṛtah ||* (Mahābhārat- Anuśāsana Prva 91.5)

<sup>8</sup> *abhumjijyā namī vedehī, rāyaguptte ya bhumjijyā | bāhuta udagam bhoccā tahā tārāgaṇe risī || āsile devile ceva, dīvāyaṇa mahārisī | pārāsare dagam bhoccā, bīyāṇi hariyāṇi ya ||* (*Sūtrakṛtāṅgasūtra* 1.3.4.2-3)

<sup>9</sup> *tatto havai sayālī bodhavve khalu tahā bhayālī ya | dīvāyaṇe ya kaṇhe tatto khalu nārae ceva ||* (*Samavāyāṅgasūtra* 668)

<sup>10</sup> *“imīse bāravaīe nayarīe navajoyanavitthinnāe java devalogabhūyāe suraggidīvāyaṇamūlāe viṇāse bhavissai”* (*Antakṛddasāṅgasūtra* 5.2)

<sup>11</sup> *kaṇhe ya karakaṇḍe ya ambade ya pārāsare | kaṇhe dīvāyaṇe ceva devagutte ya nārae ||* (*Aupapātikasūtra* 76)

author of Mahābhārata.<sup>12</sup> In the Buddhist Jataka tales also Dvaipāyana is associated with the destruction of Dvarika (Malalasekera 1937: 501). All three traditions maintain that Dvaipāyana was indeed the destroyer of Dvarika, thus, proving his historicity.

- **Parāśara:** Parāśara, another eminent ascetic mentioned in *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* also attained liberation. Parāśara is mentioned as a Brahman class in *Aupapātikasūtra* (76). The *Majjhima Nikāya* also mentions a Vedic scholar Pārāsariya who converted to Buddhism and attained Arhathood (Bodhi 1147). According to Vedic texts, Parāśara is the father of Dvaipāyana.<sup>13</sup> Arun Pratap Jain opines, “The text of one tradition coincides with the text of another tradition, we, to some extent, are bound to accept the description as historical” (Singh 192) Upaniṣadic Ṛṣis like Dvaipāyana, Nami of Videha, Bāhuka, Āsita Devala, and Parāśara are mentioned as great sages in Jain literature who also attained liberation. “These references of the Jain canonical works not only prove the open-mindedness of Jainism but also that the stream of Indian spiritualism is one at its source” (Jain 1998: 19)

## Conclusion

We may never have a correct and complete understanding of the various developments that took place if we continue to study Indian philosophy in isolation. Matthew R. Dasti also states that the “Hindu philosophy (as opposed to Buddhists, Jains, and other Indian schools which reject the Veda and allied cultural traditions) eventually came to be identified with six specific *darśanas*” and further adds, “One should keep in mind that the notion of six primary and discrete *darśanas*—and the specific list of schools that are said to comprise the six—is a later development. While, indeed, there were various schools from early on, the notion of six monolithic and completely independent traditions tracing back to antiquity is a misleading historical abstraction” (Dasti). Jain and Buddhist texts can be understood better when studied along with the Upaniṣads and vice-versa. Meanwhile, remaining unbiased will be the real challenge. Also, based on the appearances of the historical personalities in old Buddhist and Vedic literature that are similarly found in the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, we can say with a degree of certainty that the contents of *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* are older than the six *darśanas*.

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<sup>12</sup> *vistaram kuruvamśasya gāndhāryā dharmasīlatām | kṣattuh prajñām dhṛtīm kuntyāḥ samyagdvaipāyano'bravīt ||* (Mahābhārata - Ādi Parva 1.59)

<sup>13</sup> *evam dvaipāyano jaśe satyavatyām parāśarāt | nyasto dvīpe sa yad bālastasmād dvaipāyanaḥ smṛtaḥ ||* (Mahābhārata - Ādi Parva 63.86)

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