



## Tairthika Philosophy in the Mahābhārata

### KEYWORDS

**Samim Ahmed**

Assistant Professor, Belur Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira (An Autonomus PG College) Belur Math, Howrah

**ABSTRACT** *The Mahābhārata is the second epic of India. From ĀcāryaĀnandavardhana to Rabindranath Tagore there is consensus that though the main story of the Mahābhārata is the tale of war, yet warfare is not its ultimate end or goal. The philosophical war between Nāstika and Āstika is important here. The former is Purvapakṣa or opponent and the latter is Siddhāntī or deponent. There are many opponents in the epic. Some are Cārvāka, Jaina, Bauddha and Vaiśeṣika. The Siddhāntī has mentioned their views and refuted. This battle actually is a theoretical battle which was also held in the Kurukṣetra. One of such atheist school is Tairthika. We shall see their view.*

*In the AśvamedhaparvaParva, we come across one school which is Tairthika. Tairthika holds that all is beyond doubt. According to Nīlakanṭha, this school believes that nothing can be doubted. ĀcāryaSukhamayaBhattachārya comments that the Tairthikas admit that all things are free from doubt and everything has different existence. Max Muller takes Tairthikas as 'great teachers' who say that nothing can be doubted.*

*In the dictionaries and according to other texts, the term 'Tairthika' has many meanings. From all these descriptions we can conclude that this school is atheist and one of the pūrvapakṣas of the Mahābhārata. Some think that Kapila and Kaṇāda are Tairthika or heretic. Surendranath Dasgupta holds this position. This is atheist because they are heretic according to the epic.*

In the Aśvamedhaparva of the Mahābhārata it has been said that according to some group of thinkers, all is beyond doubt, or in other words, all is certain.<sup>1</sup> The commentator of the epic calls them 'Tairthika'. 'All is beyond doubt' means anything cannot be doubted. According to Sukhamaya Bhattacharya, Tairthikas think that all objects are free from doubt and each exist differently.<sup>2</sup> Max Muller ascribed Tairthika as great teacher and their view is that nothing is doubttable.<sup>3</sup>

In the BangīyaŚabdakoṣa, 'Tairthika' has five meanings<sup>4</sup>—one that is related to tīrtha (holy place or place of pilgrimage), holy (pavitra), comes from tīrtha, one who lives permanently at a tīrtha and so on. The mendicant wandering on pilgrimage is also called 'Tairthika' in BangīyaŚabdakoṣa.

In the ŚrīCaitanyaCaritāmṛta, Madhya-Līla, the word is found:

Ācāryakahe—tumihāotairthikasannyāsī

Kabhuphala-mūlakhāo, kabhuupavāsī (Text 3.81)<sup>5</sup>

The author means 'TairthikaSannyāsī' as a mendicant wandering on pilgrimages.

The experienced authors of Sastra—such as Kapila, Kaṇāda are called 'Tairthika'. It is found in the VācaspatyaAbhidhāna of Taranath Tarkavacaspati.<sup>6</sup> If the primary meaning of 'Tairthika' is one who is related to tīrtha, then we have to look at the meaning of tīrtha. One of its meanings, in the BangīyaŚabdakoṣa, is avataraṇapradeśa (descending place).<sup>7</sup> The word tīrtha has 24 meanings in that abhidhāna (dictionary). Some of those are śāstra, darśanaśāstra; agni, mantrī etc. The word 'Tīrthankara' also means śastrakāra, hence Mahāvira is called 'Tairthika' by some scholars.<sup>8</sup>

In a book called History of Indian Theatre, the word 'Tairthika' has come in a conversation between Cārvāka and his disciples. Cārvāka tells his disciples, "But Tairthika says that sensuous pleasures should be shunned as those are mixed with sorrow."<sup>9</sup>

If 'tīrtha' means darśanaśāstra too, we have to discuss Surendranath Dasgupta's view in this regard. He says, "The word 'darśana' in the sense of true philosophic knowledge has its earliest use in the VaiśeṣikaSūtras of Kaṇāda which I consider as pre-Buddhistic. The Buddhist Piṭakas (400 BC) called the heretical opinions ditṭhi (Sanskrit drṣṭi from the same root drṣ from which darśana is formed). Haribhadra (fifth century A.D.) uses the word 'Darśana' in the sense of systems of philosophy. Ratnakīrti uses the word also in the same sense. Mādhava calls his Compendium of all systems of philosophy, Sarvadarśanasamgraha. The word "mata" (opinion or view) was also freely used in quoting the views of other systems. But there is no word to denote "philosophers" in technical sense. The Buddhist used to call those who held heretical views "tairthika". The words "siddha", "jnānin" etc. do not denote philosophers in the modern sense, they are used rather in the sense of "seers" or "perfects"."<sup>10</sup>

Hence we conclude that Tairthikas are those who are against the views of mainstream (though the phrase is relative, yet we can understand its meaning), who violates the mūlamata (i.e., the Vedic view, in respect to the epic), who rejects 'the views on reality' of the mainstream. This is the definition of Tairthika, no doubt, in accordance to the mainstream or Vedic Philosophy. Dasgupta says that the Buddhists used to call those who held heretical views "tairthika". Those who hold heretical views or heresy are called 'heretic'. According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, Heretical view or heresy is a theological doctrine or system rejected as false by ecclesiastical authority. Heretic is one who does not conform to an established attitude, doctrine, or principle. We have heard of heretics in sematic reli-

gions, but it is surprising if there are heretics or persons who are hostile to Sanātana Dharma (as we have known that this religion includes all views contrary and contradictory to it). In the Viṣṇupurāṇa, it is mentioned that since Buddhists are hostile to religion, social connection with them must be severed; those who agree with Buddhist view would go to hell; Buddhists are dirty and unholy; Hindus must not establish any kind of relation with the Buddhists; even if any person hostile to religion is having deep attachment to his duties, all his performances do not result in anything.<sup>11</sup>

Later, however, Buddhadeva is admitted to be the last avatāra of Lord Viṣṇu, though he is a heretic. Hence it is difficult to determine whether heretic will be held as heretic or friendly/favourable, or be absorbed into the mainstream. The reason of calling Kapila, Kanāda, Mahāvīra and Buddhadeva heretics is that they do not believe in the existence of God. This goes against mūlāmata or established attitude.

The Mahābhārata has said, in the Aśvamedhparva (Śloka61/2), that according to some group of thinkers, all is beyond doubt; or in other words, all is certain. We shall see that whether Kapila is included to this group or not.

Generally KapilaMuni is said to be the founder of Sāṃkhya which is one of the oldest philosophical systems in India. There is mention of Sāṃkhya in the old scriptures like Caraka-Saṃhita, Manusmṛti etc.<sup>12</sup> Many writers think that the guru (teacher) of Buddhadeva was believer in the Sāṃkhya. Among his teachers, Buddhaghosha is one.<sup>13</sup> Saṃkarācārya mentions Sāṃkhya as main opponent and says that as this view (Sāṃkhya) supports dualism, it cannot be supported by Śruti.<sup>14</sup> Kautilya, as we have seen in first chapter of this thesis, calls Sāṃkhya, Yoga and Lokāyata 'Anvikṣiki'. Lokāyata Darśana does not admit God and Vedas, Sāṃkhya also refutes God. Many scholars try to prove that Sāṃkhya is theist in the sense of God-believer.<sup>15</sup> In some śloka<sup>16</sup> of the Mahābhārata, Sāṃkhya is compared to the Vedas, it is said to be eternal like the Vedas. But traditional Sāṃkhya, which is the part of the six systems of Indian philosophy, is not consistent with the Vedas. One of the main theses of Sāṃkhya system is satkāryavāda, their theory of causation. This theory has got two different forms, namely, parināma-

vāda and vivarta-vāda. According to the former, when effect is produced, there is a real transformation (parināma) of the cause into the effect, e.g. the production of pot from clay, or of curd from milk. The Sāṃkhya is in favour of parināmavāda. According to vivartavāda, which is accepted by Advaita Vedānta, the change of the cause into the effect is only apparent.<sup>17</sup> Sāṃkhya holds that this phenomenal world is an effect and material and it is real transformation of cause. Hence its cause is also material. The cause of the world is Prakṛti which is inferred. Prakṛti is constituted by three guṇas called sattva, rajas and tamas. It is the equilibrium of three guṇas or elements. The creation of world is possible through virūpa-parināma (heterogeneous transformation) of guṇas. Apart from Prakṛti, the other ultimate reality admitted by Sāṃkhya is the self or the Puruṣa which is different from the body and the senses, the manas and the intellect (buddhi). The self is conscious spirit which is always the subject of knowledge and can never become the object of any knowledge. It is inactive, apradhāna and many.<sup>18</sup> In this context, Debiprasad Chattopadhyay says that the theoretical aspect inherent in ādimatantrasādhana (primitive pursuit of the Tantra) would become, in later time, distinct philosophical form; no books of KapilaMuni is available now; the main books of Sāṃkhya system are two in number—Sāṃkhyakārikā written by Īśvarakṛṣṇa, Sāṃkhyasūtra which is said to be written by KapilaMuni.<sup>19</sup> In the Sāṃkhyakārikā of Īśvarakṛṣṇa, there are arguments against the existence of God. Even in the Sāṃkhyasūtra God is disproven. The author of Sāṃkhyasūtra did not believe in the existence of God. Since the Sāṃkhya explained in the Mahābhārata is called eternal like the Vedas, we cannot take Kapila'smata (opinion) as the Sāṃkhya view described in the epic. Rather we shall accept the theoretical aspect inherent in ādimatantrasādhana (primitive pursuit of tantra) would become, in later time, distinct philosophical form as 'Sāṃkhya' which is a heretical view, or Tairthikamata.

Thus we can show that not only Kapila but also Kanāda, Buddhadeva, Mahāvīra, Pūrāṇa Kāśyapa, MakhkhaliGosāla, AjitaKeśakamvalī, PakudhaKaccāyana, SañjayaBelatḥṭhaputta and NiganṭhaNāṭaputta. These Tairthikas have opposed the Vedas and Brāhmaṇas. There are four theories which are said to be Tairthika doctrines: (a) Kriyāvāda, (b) Akriyāvāda, (3) Ajñāvāda (4) Vaināyikavāda.<sup>20</sup>

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