

CONTRIBUTION OF PRAKRIT TO JAINA  
CANONICAL LITERATURE

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The Jaina canonical works constitute an important section of Prakrit Literature. Jainism admits in this era twenty four Tirthan karas who are responsible for the promulgation of the religion of *dharma* from time to time. The 22nd was Neminātha, the cousin of Krsna, the 23rd was Pārśvanātha whose Historicity is accepted now; and the last was Mahavira (599 to 527 B.C.), whom Buddhist texts mention as Niganthanāputta. He was senior contemporary of Buddha, he came from a ruling clan and he was related to the royal families of Magadha. The preachings of Mahavira and his disciples have come down to us in the Jaina Āgama or the canon in the Ardhamāgadhī form of Prakrit language. Exigencies of time, especially a famine, required its first systematisation by the Pataliputra council, some time in the 4th Century B.C., which was followed by subsequent attempts from time to time, attributed to eminent teachers like Skandila, Nāgārjuna and Devarddhi. There are a few texts of individual authorship too. The canon, as it is available today was systematised, rearranged, redacted and committed to writing by the Vallabhi Council under Devarddhi in the middle of the 5th Century A.D. The earlier lists of canonical texts, possibly as classified at the time of earlier compilation are preserved to us in the canon itself.

The most recognized classification, possibly of the Vallabhi council itself, is that the Āgama contains 11 Āṅgas, 12 Upāṅgas, 10 Prakirṇakas, 6 Chedasūtras, 2 Cūliasūtras, 4 Mūlasūtras.

### **ELEVEN ĀṄGAS :-**

1. Āyāraṅga (Ācārāṅga)
2. Sūyagaḍaṅga (Sūtrakṛtāṅga)
3. Thāṇāṅga (Sthānāṅga)
4. Samavāyāṅga (Samavāyāṅga)
5. Viyāhapaṇṇattī (Bhagavtī)
6. Nayadhammakahāo (Jnātṛdharmakathā vyākhayā prajñapti)
7. Uvāsagadasāo (Upāsakadasāṅga)
8. Antagaḍadasāo (Antakṛddasā)
9. Aṇuttarōvaviyādasā (Anuttaraupapātikadasā)
10. Paṇṇavāgraṇa (Praśnavyakaraṇa)
11. Vivāgasuyam (Vipākasūtra)

### **TWELVE UPĀṄGAS :-**

1. Ovavāiya - (Aupapātikṣ)
2. Rāyapasēṇīyam - (Rājaprasniya)
3. Jīvajīvābhigama
4. Paṇṇavaṇā - (Prajñāpanā)
5. Sūriyapaṇṇatti - (Sūryaprajñapti)
6. Jambūdivapannatti - (Jambūdvīpa prajñapti)
7. Chadapaṇṇatti - (Chandraprajñapti)
8. Kappiya - (Kalpikā)

9. Kappāvadamsiya - (Kalpāvatamsikā)
10. Pupphiyā - (Puṣṣikā)
11. Pupphacūla - (Puṣṣacūlā)
12. Vaṇhidasā - (Vṛṣṇidasā)

### **TEN PRAKIRŪKAS :-**

1. Causaraṇa - (Catuḥsaraṇa)
2. Āurapaccakkhāṇa - (Āturapratyākhyāna)
3. Mahāpaccakkhāṇa - (Mahāpratyākhyāna)
4. Bhattapariṇna - (Bhaktararijñā)
5. Tandulaveyābyam - (Tandulavaicārika)
6. Santhāraga - (Samstāraka)
7. Gacchāyāra - (Gacchācāra)
8. Gaṇivijjā - (Gaṇivīdyā)
9. Devindatthava - (Devendrastava)
10. Maranasamahi - (Maraṇasamādhi)

### **SIX CHEDASŪTRAS ;:-**

1. Nisiha - (Nisītha)
2. Mahānisiha - (Mahānisītha)
3. Vivahāra - (Vyavahāra)
4. Āyāradasā - (Ācāradasā)
5. Kappasutta - (Kalpaūtra)
6. Pañcakappa - (Pañcakalpa)

### **TWO CŪLIKĀSŪTRAS ;:-**

1. Nandisutta - (Nandisūtra)
2. Anuyogaddāra - (Anuyogadvāra)

## **FOUR MŪLASŪTRAS ;-**

1. Uttarajjhayana - (Uttarādhyayana)
2. Dasaveyāliya - (Daśavaikālika)
3. Āvassaya - (Āvaśyaka)
4. Piṇḍañijjutti - (Piṇḍaniryukti)

The 12th Anga, the Dṛṣṭivāda, which included the 14 pūrvas is lost. The contents of the canon are quite varied and cover almost every branch of human knowledge, as it was conceived of in these days. The texts like *Ācārāṅga*, *Daśavaikālika* gives a detailed account of Monachism as practised in Eastern India in the days of Mahāvīra. *Jīvā Jīvābhigama* etc, fully discuss the Jaina ideas about living beings. *Upāsakadasāh*, *Praśnavyākaraṇāni* etc setforth the ideas and regulations of a householder's life. *Jñātādharma-kathah*, *Vipākasūtra* and *Nirayāvavaliyāo* give good many holy legends which are moral in all their aspects and didactic in purpose. *Sūryaprajñapti* etc, discuss Jaina Cosmology. *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, *Uttarādhyayana* etc contains brilliant moral exhortations, philosophical discourses and amusing legedns and some of their sections are fine specimens of ancient Indian ascetic poetry. *Nandisūtra* gives details about Jains epistemology and the texts like the *Bhagavatisutra* are encyclopaedic in contents. Some of the stories are said in the age of Ariṣṭanemi, in some places the pupils of Pārśva and Mahāvīra are holding discussion and in most of the lessons preachings are attributed to Mahāvīra and his disciples.

Devarddhigani arranged and redacted the already existing tests of the canon as a consistent whole probably by standardising descriptions, passages and the use of synonyms in a certain text and by merely referring to them

in others by terms like '*vaṅṅao*', '*Jāva*' and numerals. The cross references do show the working of one hand. Though the matter of the present upaṅgas is as old as that of the Aṅgas, the division of upaṅgas, to correspond to Aṅgas is an innovation perhaps after the Pataliputra council. It is not known to earlier lists preserved in the original contents of works like the *Praśnavyākaraṇāṇi* upto the final redaction, re-shuffling and transposition of parts have taken place; and they can be detected even now. Some of the *Niryuktis* clearly show that they have in view a slightly different arrangement of matter in some places; and W.Schubring has shown how some lines from the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* require to be re-arranged for a consistent interpretation. Further, we have a large number of *prakiraṅkas*, but only some of them are admitted to the canon.

Though the *Ardhamagadhi* canon was redacted in the 5th Century A.D., the major and substantial portion of it is as old as the Pataliputra Council in the 4th Century B.C., in addition to the traditional account. This has been proved by the absence of any reference to Greek Astronomy in the Canon and by the nature of metre and language of its older portions. The first parts of *Ācārāṅga* and *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* are considered to be the oldest stratum of the canon, and some lessons from the *Chedasūtras* and a few sermons from the *Uttarādhyayana* and *Bhagavatisūtras* may be ranked by their side.

The canon described above, is authoritative only for the *Śvetāmbaras* and it is not admitted as genuine by the *Ḍiganbaras* who have their pro-canon. According to the *Svetāmbara* tradition, the knowledge of the 14 *pūrvas* went on decreasing and by the time of *Devarddhigaṇi* the 12th Aṅga which included the *pūrvas* disappeared. Now

and then, gāthas from pūrvas, possibly from traditional memory, are quoted even by late commentaries. There is a similar tradition of the digambaras about the gradual loss the Aṅga knowledge. There is sufficient evidence to indicate that the sacred texts were studied in monastic seminaries and handed down from teacher to pupil often in mutual isolation in distant parts of the country. Due to lapse of memory, lack of continuity of study, obscurity of technical details and passing away of outstanding custodians of scriptural knowledge etc, some or other branches of study must have fallen into oblivion in some or other branches of study must have fallen into oblivion in some seminary or the other. Any specialised branch elaborately preserved in one seminary, it is quite likely, gradually came to disowned by others on account of certain differences in dogmas grown in the mean time. That is how, in all probability, the Digambaras came to disown the Aṅgas and the *Dr̥ṣṭivāda* was considered as lost by the Svetāambaras. Portions of the *Dr̥ṣṭivāda*, it has been lately shown by Dr. Hiralal, lie at the basis of the Prakrit-Samsrot commentaries and Kaṣāyaprābhṛta which with huge Prakrit-Sanskrit commentaries have been brought to light. The limited studies that have been carried on do indicate that both of them (Digambaras and Svetāambaras) had a common literature once, and even today common matter expressed in almost identical terms, can be detected in the early literature of both. A full estimate of early Jaina literature and the ideology embodied therein is possible only by studying comparatively the older works preserved by both sections of the Jainas.

The canon comprises works of different origin and age, and naturally it is difficult to estimate its literary character. The redaction has brought together distinctly separate parts

of works. Some are in prose, some in verse and some in prose and verses. The prose of *Ācārāṅga* contains interwoven manifold difficulties of interpretation. The old prose works are diffused in style with endless mechanical repetitions. Some works contain pithy remarks pregnant with meaning. The didactic sections present vigorous exposition in a fluent style. The standardised descriptions, obviously siming at a literary effect are heavy in construction with irregular compound expressions. The rules of monastic life are full of details and the dogmatic lessons show a good deal of systematic expositions. There are narratives containing parables and similes of symbolic significance. There are exemplary stories of ascetic heroes and there are debates on dogmatic topics, in addition to biographical details about Pārśva, Mahāvīra and their contemporaries. The canon when studied along with Pāli tests, yields valuable information about contemporary life and thought.

Mahāvīra is said to have preached in Ardhamāgadhī form of prakrit, which, therefore, is the name of the canonical language. The older portions preserve archaic forms of language and style. These gradually disappear in later works, and there is seen the influence of linguistic tendencies well known in Mahārāṣṭri which was evolving as a literary language in the early centuries of the Christian era. Such a modernisation was inevitable in course of oral transmission especially because the Śvetāmbara monks were already using the Prakrit not only as a language of religious scriptures but also as a vehicle of literary expression. In the verses common to both the Digambara tests soften the intervocalic consonants, while those of the Svetambaras lose them leaving behind the vowels.

Prior to the Pataliputra Council, at the time of Chandragupta Maurya, a body of Jaina monks, on the

advent of a famine, migrated to the South under Bhadrabāhu, Lest the scriptural knowledge might fall into oblivion, after the famine a council of monks was called at Pataliputra to compile the canon, but the canon so compiled was not acceptable to those who had migrated to the south. The conditions of famine had possibly created a gulf between the practices of monks that remained in Magadha and of those that had gone out to the south. Differences about dogmas and practices might have been there even earlier, but scholars look upon this as the possible seed of the Jaina Church into Svetāmbara and Digambara. This explains to a certain extent, why the Digambararas disown the Ardhamāgadhi canon of Pataliputra. To satisfy the religious needs of community, they began jotting down their memory notes which have survived to us in the form of many prakrit texts that deserve to be called the pro-canon of the Jainas. The earliest of these are the *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama* and *Kaṣāyāprabhṛta* which are the remnants of the *Dr̥ṣṭivāda*. The commentaries of Virasena and Jinasena (816 A.D.) incorporate earlier commentaries in Prakrit and they indicate what an amount of traditional details was associated with the original *sūtras*. They deal with the highly technical and elaborate doctrine of karman which is a unique feature speciality of Jainism among Indian religions. Among the works of the pro-canon, the *Mulācāra* of Vaṭṭakera and the *Ārādhana* of Shivārya have a close kinship with the canon, and give elaborate details about the monastic life, its rules and regulations. The Prakrit bhaktis are a sort of devotional compositions of daily recitation.

A large number of works is attributed to Kundakinda, but only a few of them have come down to us.



His *Pañcāstikāya* and *Pravacanasāra* are systematic expositions of Jaina Ontology and epistemology and his *Samayasāra* is full of spiritual fervour. Yativṛṣabha's *Tiloya-Paṇṇatti* covers a wide range of topics and has served the purpose of a source book. The compilation or composition of all these works based on traditional material, might be assigned to the early centuries of the Christian era.

A good deal of Prakrit Literature has grown round the canon itself by way of explanation, detailed exposition, illustration through tales and topical systematisation. On some canonical texts there are the *Niryuktis*, a sort of metrical commentaries which explain the topics by instituting various enquiries. They are attributed to Bhadrabahu and are undoubtedly anterior to Devarddhi's council. Some of them in turn, on account of their systematic exposition, accuracy of details and solidity of arguments became the object of learned labours of great scholars. For instance Jinabhadra kdamāśramana (609 A.D.) wrote highly elaborate *Bhāṣya* in Prakrit on the *Āvaṣyaka Niryukti* round which has grown a little world of literature. *Bhāṣya* and *Cūrṇi* commentaries are found on some works. *Bhāṣya* is an elaborate exposition, at times incorporating and supplementing the *Niryukti* verses of the text in prakrit, while *Cūrṇi* is a prose gloss written in a bewildering admixture of prakrit and sanskrit.

This, in brief, is the contribution of Prakrit to Jaina Canonnical literature.