

JAINA AGMIC LITERATURE
IMPORTANCE OF RIGHT KNOWLEDGE

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IMPORTANCE OF RIGHT KNOWLEDGE

Thoughts and actions are the two aspects of life. Thought is the subject of intellect, it is based on study, contemplation and concentration. Only that thought is valuable which is based on truth. When such truthful thought is practised in life, it results in right conduct. Therefore, the first requirement of an aspirant is the acquisition of right knowledge. Lord Mahavira said, " पढमं नानं तओ दया " i.e., one who has right knowledge only can pursue the path of righteous conduct. Such a person will have compassion in heart and strength in his mind.

Only that knowledge is true which has been acquired by direct experience. The soul is the source of infinite knowledge but that is obscured by the veil of karmas. When the veil of karmas is removed by austerities and meditation, a person annihilates all the karmas and then the infinite power of soul is manifested. Such souls are called *Vītarāga*, the perfected souls, who have achieved victory over all conflicts and passions like attachment, aversion and anger. They become Jinas or the conquerors.

DEFINITION OF ĀGAMA

The divine utterances of such perfected souls is called the 'Āgama'. The *Nyāyasūtra* defines the Āgamas as "आप्तीपदेश शब्द" i.e., Āgama is that which is told by *Āpta* i.e., authentic personages. Thus the teachings of Jinās are the Jaina Āgamas. In Jaina tradition, the Jinās shower the nectar of divine words only after obtaining omniscience. Their discourses are constructed in *Sūtra* form by their prime disciples known as Gaṇadhara. Such *Sūtras* are the Āgamas, the authentic literature. The Āgamas are also defined as that knowledge which has been handed down since times immemorial.

THE ORAL TRADITION

In ancient India, the oral tradition of rote was prevalent. The disciples used to listen to scriptures from their spiritual masters, memorise them and pass it on to their successors. This went on for a long time. The Vedas, the Āgamas and the Piṭṭakas were preserved in this manner. The Vedas were called "Śruti" and the Āgamas *Śruta* in the true spirit of their being passed on by rote. According to Jaina tradition, besides the words of Tīrthaṅkaras, the words of other perfected souls including Sthavirs were also regarded as Āgamas. Sthavirs may either be *Śrutakevalīs* (those who have mastered all Āgamas) or *Daśpūrvīs* (those who have mastered the ten Purvas).

COMPILATION OF ĀGAMIC LITERATURE

History reveals that upto 160 years after the nirvāṇa of Lord Mahāvīra, the oral tradition of Āgamas prevailed. However a severe famine for twelve long years struck Magadha (South Bihar) during the reign of Candragupta

Maurya. Due to this many monks perished and many dispersed to other areas. The Jaina Saṅgha began to worry about the safety of holy Āgamas. After the famine, the first council of monks was held at Pāṭaliputra (modern Patna) under the leadership of Ācārya Sthūlibhadra to compile the vest Āgamic literature. During this council, eleven Aṅgas were recited, none of the monks present had in their memory the twelfth Aṅga Dṛṣṭavāda. The only monk who had the knowledge of this was Ācārya Bhadrabāhu, the guru of Sthulibhadra, but he had gone to Nepal to conduct Mahāprāṇa dhyāna (severe yogic activities) for twelve years. The Jaina congregation then decided to send Ācārya Sthūlibhadra and his disciple monks to Nepal to acquire the knowledge of ten Dṛṣṭivāda. Ācārya Sthūlibhadra learned the knowledge of ten Pūrvas from Ācārya Bhadrabāhu. At that time, he exhibited some special supernatural powers, acquired by him from his guru. When the guru came to know of it, he declined to impart the knowledge of remaining four Pūrvas to Sthūlibhadra. After much persuasion he agreed to impart only the text of the remaining four Pūrvas but not their imports. Thus, Sthūlibhadra could memorise the entire texts but he could learn the meaning of only ten Pūrvas but not their imports. Thus, Sthūlibhadra could memorise the entire texts but he could learn the meaning of only ten Pūrvas and not all fourteen Purvas. This was the first attempt to compile the Āgamas and this conference was known as the Pāṭaliputra rendering. However, the Āgamic literature was still not written and the basis of safeguarding it was still by oral tradition.

PRESERVATION OF ĀGAMAS

The Jaina have always tried hard to preserve their sacred literature. However, there is no doubt that the Āgamas as told by Lord Mahāvīra and presented by the Gaṇadharas (prime disciples) are not found in their complete form today. As the languages of the Āgamas was Prākṛit, which was the language of the masses, it was but natural for the change to occur even in the rendering of sacred literature. Unlike the Vedic brāhmins, the Jainas could not preserve every word of their sacred literature. But it is certain that the portions available today are authentic and close to the preachings of Lord Mahāvīra.

Thus till the time of Sthūlibhadra, the knowledge of the twelve Angas was intact but after his demise only eleven Angas and a part of the twelfth Aṅga remained available. Sthūlibhadra died 215 years after Lord Mahāvīra's nirvaṇa.

As mentioned above, the Jaina literature was composed in Prākṛit, which was the spoken language of that time and not constructed by the strict rules of grammar. The ability to memorise perfectly was also weakening. Hence, it was inevitable for linguistic changes to creep in the scriptures.

THE SECOND CONVENTION

To add to the misfortune, another twelve year long famine hit the northern parts of India. In the absence of learning, revising and contemplation, the scriptures began to get lost. In course of time, the need was felt that another attempt should be made to systematize the scriptures. Between 827-840 years of Lord Mahāvīra's nirvaṇa, a

second attempt was made. After the famine, under the leadership of Ārya Skandila, the Jaina council of Monks met in Mathurā. The monks present compiled those Āgamas that they had been able to retain in their memory. In this congregation also the scriptures were only recited and not written - this was called the Māthurī rendering. It was the second attempt of systematizing the Āgamas. During this same period another great Jain monk, Nāgārjunasūri also invited many monks in Saurāstra in a council and tried to systematize the Āgamic literature.

THE THIRD CONVENTION

150 years after the second attempt, a third attempt was made under the leadership of Devardhigaṇi Kṣamāśramaṇa in Valiabhīnagar (modern *Saurāstra*). Besides the Āgamas orally compiled in the first two councils, other available works and commentaries too were compiled in this council. The differences in the texts compiled during the two councils were reconciled and systematized. This task was undertaken 980 years after Lord Mahāvīra's Nirvāṇa. The Āgamas available today represent the ones accepted and systematized in the third convention. The special feature of this council was that the sacred scriptures were finally written down. The differences occurring in the texts were mentioned and the twelfth Aṅga Dṛṣṭivāda was declared unavailable as it was not found in the memory of anyone. Devardhigaṇi is reported to have distributed copies of the scriptures to all the centres of scriptural studies which were flourishing in those days.

ĀGAMIC LITERATURE

The Āgamic literature of the jainas mainly consists of thirty two texts which are divided into three groups of works known as Pūrvas (older), Aṅgs (inner corpus) and Aṅgabāhyas (outer corpus), all handed down in the ancient language, Ardhamāgadhi.

The Pūrvas : These include fourteen works of great antiquity claimed by the Jainas to go back to the time of Lord Pārśva. Unfortunately, these texts are no longer extant, only a brief description of their content is available in the later literature. The twelve Aṅgas or limbs are as follows : 1. *Acārāṅga*, 2. *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, 3. *Sthānāṅga*, 4. *Samavāyaṅga*, 5. *Vyākhyāprajñapti* (*Bhagavatī*), 6. *Jñātrdharma-kathā*, 7. *Upāsakadaśāḥ*, 8. *Antakṛddaśāḥ*, 9. *Anuttara-upapātika*, 10. *Prāśna-vyākaraṇa*, 11. *Vipākaand*, 12. *Drstivada*-now extinct.

The supplements and the commentaries of these texts are found in the form of Upāṅgas, Chedas, Mūlas and Āvaśyakas.

The twelve Upāṅgas are as follows :—

1. *Aupapātika*, 2. *Rājpraśnīya*, 3. *Jīvājīvābhigama*, 4. *Prajñāpanā*, 5. *Sūryaprajñapti*, 6. *Jambūdvīpaprajñapti*, 7. *Candraprajñapti*, 8. *Nirayāvalī*, 9. *Kalpāvtaṃsikāḥ*, 10. *Puṣpikāḥ*, 11. *Puṣpacūlikāḥ* and 12. *Vṛṣṇidaśāḥ*.

The following are the four Chedasūtras :

1. *Vyavahāra*, 2. *Bṛhatkalpa*, 3. *Niśītha*, and
4. *Daśāśrutaskandha*.

The following are the four Mūlasūtras :

1. *Daśavaikālika*, 2. *Uttarādhyayana*, 3. *Nandī*
- and 4. *Anuyogaadvaya*.

There is only one *Āvaśyaka*.

Thus the 11 *Aṅgas*, 12 *Upāṅgas*, 4 *Chedas*, 4 *Mūlas* and one *Āvaśyaka* are 32 in number. There are also 13 *Prakīrṇakas* and so the *Āgamas* are 45 in number. Some believe that there are more than 13 *Prakīrṇakas* and according to them, the *Āgamas* are 84 in number.

CLASSIFICATION OF ĀGAMAS

The *Āgamas* cover the knowledge of a vast array of subjects including philosophy, ethics, religion, logic, metaphysics, cosmology and astrology. *Ārya Rakṣitsūri* classified the *Āgamas* on the basis of their subject matter into four *Anuyogas*.

They are as follows :

1. *Caraṇa Karaṇānuyoga*:- The subjects of this *Anuyoga* are precepts for spiritual development namely right faith, right knowledge, right conduct, self-restraint, celibacy, austerity, vows and the conquest of the senses and passions. The two *Aṅgas* (*Ācāranga* and *Praśnāvyākaraṇa*), *Daśavaikālika Mūla Sūtra*, four *Chedasūtras* (*Niśītha*, *Vyavahāra*, *Bṛhatkalpa* and *Daśāśruta*) and *Āvaśyaka Sūtra* form the contents of this *Anuyoga*.
2. *Dharma Kathānuyoga* :- This *Anuyoga* throws light on the importance of compassion, charity, conduct,

forgiveness simplicity, modesty and the like. The special feature of this Anuyoga is the usage of stories and fables as the mode of instruction.

The five Aṅgas viz., *Jñātṛdharmakathā*, *Upāsaladasāḥ*, *Antakṛdasāḥ*, *Anuttaraupapātika* and *Vipāka*, the seven upaṅgas viz., *Anupapātika*, *Rājaprasānīya*, *Nirayāvalī*, *Kalpāvatamsikāḥ*, *Puṣpikāḥ*, *Puṣpacūlikāḥ* and *Vṛṣṇidaśāḥ* and *Uttarādhyayana Mūla Sūtra* are covered in this Anuyoga.

3. *Gaṇitānuyoga* – This Anuyoga contains all the subjects based on mathematics and calculations. The three upaṅgas viz., *Jambūdvipaprajñapti*, *Chandraprajñapti* and *Sūryaprajñapti* are elaborately dealt with in this Anuyoga.
4. *Dravyānuyoga* – The metaphysical elements of soul, non-soul and other substances, the nine tattvas and philosophical principles are elaborated in depth in this Anuyoga.

The four Aṅgas - *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, *Sthānaṅga*, *Samavāyaṅga* and *Vyākhyāprajñapti*, the two upaṅgas viz., *Jīvājīvabhigama*, *Prajñāpanā*, the two *Mūlasūtras* viz., *Nandī* and *Anuyogadvāra* and some portions of *Uttarādhyayana Sūtra* are included in this Anuyoga.

COMMENTARY LITERATURE

we found an exhaustive commentary literature on the Āgamas in the form of *Niryukti*, *Bhāṣya*, *Cūrni*, *Tīka*, *Vrttri*, *Vyākhyā* and others. These were solely written with the aim of making the study of Āgamas simple and intelligible.

However, the *Cūrnis* were written in Prākṛit as well as Sanskrit, the latter being more prevalent. The *Niryuktis* and *Bhāṣyas* were written in Prākṛit. To make the subject lucid, the mode of stories too was adopted in different contents.

This mixed style of writing in both languages is known as *Mañi-Pravāl Nyāya*. Just as in a garland of gems and corals, both can be differentiated, so also in the *cūrnis*, both Sanskrit and Prākṛit are easily distinguishable. The same style has been adopted in some *Tīkas* too. *Āgama*, *Niryukti*, *Bhāṣya*, *Cūrni* and *Tīka* – These together constitute the *Pancaṅgī* literature.

SIGNIFICANCE OF AGAMIC LITERATURE

The Āgamic literature is important not only from the point of view of studying Jain religion and philosophy, but also to understand the ancient Indian way of life. The Āgamas give a complete picture of the social life, religious and spiritual exercises, education, trade and commerce, agriculture, law and order, crime and punishment, structure of society, villages, and cities, transport and communication, art and craft etc. prevalent at that time. Ardhamāgadhī

Āgamas and the Pāli Piṭṭakas are the two sources available today which present lively picture of the people of India 2500 years ago. It is noteworthy that the message of Jainism and Buddhism was not limited to those two sects only but it spread to all parts of the country in the language of the masses. It is to be noted that Māgadhī Prākṛit was later known as Pāli.

DIGAMBARA VIEWS ON ĀGAMAS

The above mentioned Āgamas are not accepted by the Digambara sect of Jains. They believe that 683 years after the nirvāṇa of lord Mahāvīra, the entire Āgamic literature was lost. However, the loss was not really 'total'. The Digambara first adopted this expression in order to reject the authenticity of scriptures retained by Śvetāmbaras.

ṢAṬKHAṆḌĀGAMA

The most authentic scripture accepted by the Digambaras is *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama*, which is considered to be an equivalent of the *Dvādaśāṅga* (the twelve Aṅgas). The Digambaras have immense faith in it consider it to be very sacred. *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama* enjoys an esteemed place not only in Jaina literature but in the entire religious and spiritual literature of India for the exhaustive and detailed description of karma of karma and other important theories.

There is no mention of the title *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama* in the original texts. But the famous commentator Ācārya Vīrasena has discussed the text in six parts, hence it came to be known as *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama*.

The Digambaras believe that when most of the Āgamic literature was lost and very little of it was available,

only Ācārya Dharasena had the knowledge of some of the Aṅgas and Pūrvas. At that time he was engaged in deep meditation in the Candra cave of the Girnār mountain range in Śaurāṣṭra. One day he thought that whatever knowledge of the Āgamas he had, it should be imparted to some worthy persons to save it from getting lost. At that time a convention was held at Mahimānagarī, where many monks had gathered. Acarya Dharasena sent a message to them and expressed his desire to impart the knowledge of the Āgamas to worthy scholars.

The monks taking part in the convention realized the importance of the message sent by Ācārya Dharasena and sent two worthy monks, Puspadanta and Bhūtabali to meet him. Dharasena first put the two to test and when they passed the test, a delighted Dharasena, imparted the knowledge of the Āgamas to both of them.

These two monks later authored the Śaṭkhaṇḍāgama. It is believed that Puspadanta wrote 177 Sūtras of the first chapter and Bhūtabali completed the remaining chapter and also wrote from second to sixth chapter comprising 32853 Sutras.

In the Dhavaḷa commentary on 'Śaṭkhaṇḍāgama' it is mentioned that the actual author of the text is Lord Mahavira who imparted it to Shri Gautama Gaṇadhara, his first prime disciple, who later revealed it to his disciples. Finally it was Puspandanta and Bhutabali who manuscripted it.

The entire Jaina congregation rejoiced on the day when Śaṭkhaṇḍāgama was completed. It was a Thursday, the 5th day of the bright half of the Jyeṣṭha month of the Hindu almanac. The entire Saṅgh worshipped the text and to this day it is celebrated as *Śruta Pañchamī* and on this

day the goddess of knowledge and scripture is worshipped by devoted aspirants.

DHAVALĀ – COMMENTARY ON ṢATKHAṆḌĀGAMA

In the 9th century of Vikram Era, Ācārya Vīrasena wrote the Dhavalā Commentary on *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama* and it comprised 72,000 slokas. Ācārya Vīrasena was a profound scholar. He had made an exhaustive study of philosophy and religion in general and Jaina Philosophy and religion in particular. Although the commentary is vast and exhaustive, it is significant due to the deep philosophical thought it presents, the debates that took place between many Indian schools, of thought and as an intellectual investigation of various subjects. Indeed the contribution of Ācārya Vīrasena is unequalled and incomparable in the field of Indian philosophical thought.

KAṢĀYA PĀHŪḌA

Another important scripture accepted by the Digambaras is *Kaṣāya-Pahūda* or *Kaṣāyaprabharta*. The author of *Kaṣāya-Pahūda* is Ācārya Gunabhadra. After *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍagāma*, *Kaṣāya-Pahūda* is the second important scripture and it is read and revered right from the earlier times. Both of these deal with the Jaina theory of the bondage of the soul and are very comprehensive texts. Ācārya Vīrasena wanted to write a commentary on *Kaṣāya-Pahūda* too. He started but lived to comment only on a portion of the text and that commentary comprised of 20000 ślokas. It is known as Dhavalā. After his death, the task was undertaken by his disciple Jinasena. Like his preceptor Ācārya Jinasena was also an erudite scholar and an authority in his own right. With sincere devotion, he fulfilled the task of completing the commentary in 40,000 ślokas.

Thus the entire commentary comprises 60,000 śloka. It was known a Jayadhavalā.

The language of Satkhandagama and Kaṣāya Pāhuḍa is Saurasenī Prākṛit. The texts and their commentaries run altogether to some 120000 verses, preserved on palm-leaf manuscripts but in recent years they have been edited and published.

CLASSIFICATION BY DIGAMBARAS

The Digambaras have also classified the Āgamic literature into four groups according to their subject matter which are looked upon as Jain-Vadas. Their classification as the four Anuyogas is as follows :-

1. *Prathamānuyoga* - *Padmapurāṇa* by Ravisena
Harivaṇṣapurāṇa by Jinasena
Ādipūrāṇa by Jinasena
Uttarapurāṇa by Guṇabhadra.
2. *Karaṇānuy* - *Sūryaprajñapti Candraprajñapti*
and *Jayadhavalā*.
3. *Dravyānuyoga* - *Pravachanasāra, Samayasāra*
Niyamasāra & Pancāstikāya
by Kundakunda. *Tattvārtha-*
Sūtra by Umāsvati and commen-
taries on *Tattvārtha Sūtra-*
Aptamīmams by
Samantabhadra, and other
commentarie by Pajyapāda,
Akalanka and Vidyānanda.
4. *Caraṇānuyoga* - *Mūlachāra* by vaṭṭakera
Trivarnācāra, &
Ratnakaraṇḍasrāvākācār.

Collectively these expositions of the two Jaina schools constitute one of the greatest collections of non-vedic Indian scriptures.

THE CONTENTS OF THE ĀGAMAS

The contents of some of the major Āgamas are as follows:-

1. *Ācāraṅga* : The most ancient and important Aṅga, this forms the low books of Jaina monks and nuns. It is accorded great reverence because its exposition of law forms the very foundation of mendicant conduct. It explains five *Samitis* (vigilance) and three *Guptis* (restraints). It also contains a very authoritative account of Lord Mahāvīra's spiritual practices.
2. *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* : Contains details of Jaina philosophical knowledge, humility, reverence, the acceptable and unacceptable objects, monastic initiation, ordination and critical examination of other philosophical schools of that period.
3. *Sthānāṅga* : It is a kind of encyclopedia, it considers numerical description of scriptural topics. It gives details of subjects ranging from one to ten.
4. *Samavāyāṅga* : It is a continuation of the third. It preserves some records of twelve Angas and discusses the totality of every entity with respect to its substance, space, time and modes.
5. *Bhagavatī* : It is the most voluminous work of the entire Āgamic literature. It contains countless question of Indrabhūti Gautama and answers by Lord Mahāvīra. It is also of great historical importance as it contains debates held by several scholars and lay-

people with Lord Mahāvīra about the existence of the soul, analysis of various philosophical tenets and narration of the incidents of that period.

6. *Jñātrodharmakathā* : Jaina faith has been preached through a large collection of narrative and didactic stories.
7. *Upāsakadaśāh* : Gives an exemplary account of the biographies of ten lay-men, who took to vows and led and austere life.
8. *Antakṛddasāh* : Life sketch of those personalities (monks as well as householders) who attained final emancipation by practising rigorous austerities.
9. *Aupapātika* : Life sketch of those aspirants who led a pious life, practised austerities and attained heavenly bliss.
10. *Vipāka* : This work deals with the irrevocable law of karma, the results that follow from good and bad deeds performed in previous lives.
11. *Daśāśrutaskandha (Kalpasūtra)* : This text highlights the Jaina way of life and includes a life sketch of Lord Mahāvīra and other Tīrthaṅkaras.
12. *Daśavaikālīka* : It contains ten chapters on a variety of subjects pertaining to the life and spiritual practices of a monk. Here the whole Jaina philosophy is explained in a nutshell.
13. *Uttarādhyayana* : It is the most popular text on Jaina anthology and is an invaluable guide to spiritual seekers. It is claimed to be the last sermon of Lord Mahāvīra. *Uttarādhyayana* is a mixture of dialogues, parables and catechisms, mostly in verse. The tenets of Jaina conduct, ethics, spirituality and philosophy are explained in very lucid manner.

14. *Nandī* : The text explains the nature of knowledge and details of the various kinds of knowledge in a very interesting style.
15. *Jambūdvīparajñapti* and
16. *Sūryaaprajñapti* : These two texts deal respectively with cosmology, movement of the sun and the moon etc.
17. *Āvaśyaka Niryukti* : The details of debates that scholars of other schools had with Lord Mahāvīra.
18. *Āvaśyaka Cūrni* : This commentary on *Āvaśyaka* illustrates the various incidents that took place in Lord Mahāvīra's life.
19. *Viśeṣavaśyaka* : Philosophical principles of almost all philosophical schools.

This short account of Jaina Agamic tradition gives us some idea of the immense vitality which has pervaded this tradition throughout its history.

THE MESSAGE OF INSPIRATION

The Āgamas cover a wide range of topics which serve not only an ideological purpose but are also of practical importance. The importance of vows, right faith, right knowledge, right conduct, self-restraint, austerity, celibacy, conquest of senses, charity, compassion, reflections, righteousness, auspicious acts, stoppage and annihilation of karmas, emancipation, etc. have been very magnificently illustrated.

The thoughts conveyed in the Āgamas about the importance of noble character, spiritual accomplishment, simple living, vigilance, etc. are inspiring and thought provoking. These truths which were propounded centuries ago continue to inspire mankind to lead a pure and virtuous life.