

Jain Agam Literature

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Background

Lord Mahavir's preaching was orally compiled by his disciples into many Sutras (texts). Collectively these texts are called Jain canonical or Agam literature. Traditionally these sutras were orally pass on from teachers (acharyas or gurus) to the disciples for several centuries. Also, during the course of time many learned acharyas (elder monks) compiled commentaries on the various subjects of the Agam literature. In olden times, the books were hand-written and rare. Also the religious books and scriptures were considered possessions and attachments for ascetics. Therefore Agam sutras were rarely documented and not widely distributed for or by ascetics.

During the course of time, it became extremely difficult to keep memorizing the entire Jain literature (Agam sutras and Commentary literature) compiled by the many scholars of the past and present. Also there occurred a twelve years of famine around 350 BC. It was extremely difficult for the Jain ascetics to survive during this time. Under such circumstances they could not preserve the entire canonical literature. In fact, a significant number of Agam sutras were already forgotten and lost after the famine.

Later, when the Jain congregation relaxed the vow of non-possession with regards to religious scriptures for ascetics, they had already forgotten much of the oldest canonical literature such as fourteen Purva Agams and the rest were polluted with modifications and errors.

The Digambar Jain sect maintains that after the famine, the entire Jain canonical literature (Agam Sutras) became extinct. However the Svetambar sect believes that only fourteen Purvas were forgotten but the significant portion of the remaining Agam Sutras were preserved by them and hence they decided to document the Agam Sutras (canonical literature) as remembered by them at various time.

Jain history indicates that during the course of time, Svetambar ascetics held three conferences; at Patli-putra @320 B.C., at Mathura and Valabhi @380 A.D., and at Valabhi @520 A.D. for the preservation of the Jain canonical and other literature. Most of the documentation occurred during 2nd and 3rd conferences.

Around 1500 A.D., the Svetambar sect also divided into three subsects known as Svetambar Murtipujak, Sthanakvasi, and Terapanthi. Differences also exist among all three Svetambar Jain sects in their acceptance of the validity of the documented Jain scriptures (Agam Sutras) and literature.

Jain Literature

Jain literature is classified into two major categories:

Agam Literature (Agam Sutras)

Agam literature consists of many texts, which are the sacred books of the Jain religion. They are written in the Ardha-magadhi Prakrit language.

Non-agam Literature

Non-agam literature consists of commentary and explanation of Agam literature, and independent works, compiled by ascetics and scholars. They are written in many languages such as Prakrit, Sanskrit, Apabhramsa, Old Marathi, Rajasthani, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannad, Tamil, German, and English.

Agam Literature:

Lord Mahavir's preaching was methodically compiled by his immediate disciples known as Gandharas, and elder monks known as Srut-kevalis into many texts known as Sutras. These Sutras are collectively known as Agams or Agam Sutras, the sacred books of the Jain religion. Hence, the Jain religion does not have one sacred book like the Bible or Koran, but it has many books compiled by several Gandharas and Srut-kevalis.

Agam literature is also divided into two groups:

- Ang-agams or Ang-pravista-agams
- Ang-bahya-agams (outside of Ang-agams)

Ang-agams or Ang-pravista-agams:

Lord Mahavir's immediate disciples were known as Ganadharas. All Ganadharas possessed perfect knowledge (keval-jnan) and attained liberation at the end of their human life. They orally compiled the direct preaching of Lord Mahavir into twelve main texts (sutras). These texts are known as Ang-agams. Hence the Ang-agams are the oldest religious scriptures and the back bone of Jain literature.

The twelfth Ang-agam is called Drastivad. The Drastivad consists of fourteen Purva texts, also known as Purvas or Purva-agams. Among Ang-agams, Purvas were the oldest sacred texts. All Jain sects believe that knowledge of the Purvas (Drastivad) were gradually lost starting about one hundred fifty years after Lord Mahavir's nirvan (death). However, the subject matter of the Purvas are referenced by other Jain scriptures and literature.

The Digambar Jain sect also believes that the remaining eleven Ang-agams were gradually lost. All Svetambar Jains believe that the original intent and proper meaning of the eleven Ang-agams survived and were properly documented by elder monks (Acharyas) during the three conferences that were held by Svetambar ascetics in the past.

Present Status

Number of Number of Number of

Sects Ang-agams Ang-agams Ang-agams

Accepted Available Lost

Digambar 12 0 12

Svetambar Murtipujak 12 11 1

Svetambar Sthanakvasi 12 11 1

Ang-bahya-agams (outside of Ang-agams):

Monks who had knowledge of a minimum of ten Purvas were known as Srut-kevlis. They possessed the total knowledge of the Ang-agams. The Srut-kevlis wrote many texts (sutras) expanding the subject matter of the Ang-agams. Collectively these texts are called Ang-bahya-agams meaning outside of Ang-agams.

The different Jain sects accept different numbers of Ang-bahya texts. However the Digambar sect believes that they were also gradually lost starting about two hundred years after Lord Mahavir's Nirvan.

Present Status

Number of Number of Number of

Ang-bhya-agams Ang-bhya-agams Ang-bhya-

Accepted Available Lost

Digambar 14 0 14

Swetambar Murtipujak 34 34 0

Swetambar Sthanakvasi 21 21 0

Swetambar Terapanthi 21 21 0

Classification of Ang-bahya-agams:

The Swetambar sect has divided Ang-bahya-agams into the following categories:

Upang-sutras or Upang-agams:

The scriptures which provide further explanation of Ang-agams are called Upang-agams.

Chhed-sutras or Chhed-agams:

The subject matters described in Chhed-sutras are only for ascetics not for lay people. They relate to the conduct and behavior of monks and nuns. They also explains how they can repent for their sins and mistakes.

Mool-sutras:

The scriptures which are essential for ascetics to study in the earlier stages of their monkhood are called Mool-sutras.

Chulika-sutras:

The scriptures which further enhance or decorate the meaning of Ang-agams are

known as Chulika-sutras.

Prakirna-sutras:

The scriptures which describe independent or miscellaneous subjects of the Jain religion are known as Prakirna-sutras.

Following is the list of number of Ang-bahya-agams accepted as authentic scriptures by different Jain Svetambar Sects:

Svetambar Sthanakvasi and

Murtipujak Terapanthi

Upang-agams 12 12

Chhed-sutra-agams 6 4

Mool-sutra-agams 4 3

Chulika-sutra-agams 2 2

Prakirna-sutra-agams 10 none

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Total Ang-bahya-agams 34 21

Digambar Jain Literature:

The Digambar sect believes that there were 26 Agam-sutras (12 Ang-agams + 14 Ang-bahya-agams). However, they believe that they were gradually lost starting from one hundred fifty years after Lord Mahavir's nirvana. Hence the existing Agam-sutras (which are accepted by the Svetambar sects) are not accepted by them as authentic scriptures.

In the absence of authentic scriptures, Digambers use two main texts, commentaries on main texts, and four Anuyogs consisting of more than 20 texts as the basis for their religious practice. These scriptures were written by great Acharyas (scholars) from 100 to 1000 A.D. using the original Agam Sutras as their basis.

Two Main Texts:

1. Shatkhand-agam or Maha-kammappayadi-pahuda or Maha-karma-prabhut

Commentary1 - Dhaval-tika

Commentary2 - Maha-dhaval-tika

2. Kashay-pahud or Kashay Prabhrut

Commentary - Jaya-dhaval-tika

Four Anuyogas:

1. Pratham-anuyoga(Dharma-kath-anuyoga) - Religious Stories
2. Charn-anuyoga - Conduct
3. Karan-anuyoga (Ganit-anuyoga) - Mathematics
4. Dravy-anuyoga - Philosophy

Shatkhand-agam:

The Shatkhand-agam is also known as Maha-kammapayadi-pahuda or Maha-karma-prabhut. It was written by two Acharyas; Pushpadant and Bhutabali around 160 A.D. The second Purva-agam named Agraya-niya was used as the basis for this scripture. The scripture contains six volumes. Acharya Virsen wrote two commentary texts, known as Dhaval-tika on the first five volumes and Maha-dhaval-tika on the sixth volume of this scripture, around 780 A.D.

Kashay-pahud or Kashay-prabhut:

The Kasay-pahud was written by Acharya Gunadhara. The fifth Purva-agam named Jnan-pravad was used as a basis for this scripture. Acharya Virsen and his disciple, Jinsen, wrote a commentary text known as Jaya-dhaval-tika around 780 A.D.

Four Anuyogas:

1. Pratham-anuyoga (Dharma-kath-anuyoga) - Religious Stories

This anuyoga consists of the following texts which contain religious stories, art, literature, history, poetry, and like literature.

Name Author Time

Padma-puran Ravisen 650 A.D.

Harivamsa-puran Jinsen II 783 A.D.

Adi-puran Jinsen II 783 A.D.

Uttar-puran Gunabhadra 879 A.D.

2. Charn-anuyoga - Conduct

This anuyoga consists of the following texts which contain principles of observances, conduct, behavior, and like literature.

Mulachar Vattaura 600 A.D.

Trivarnachar Vattaura 600 A.D.

Ratna-karanda-shravak-achar Samantabhadra 600 A.D.

3. Karan-anuyoga (Ganit-anuyog) - Mathematics

This anuyoga expounded the texts which had mathematical view points. It consists of the following texts which contain geography, mathematics, astronomy, astrology, and like literature.

Surya-prajnapti Unknown

Chandra-prajnapti Unknown

Jaya-dhaval-tika Virsen/Jinsen 780 A.D.

Gommat-sar Nemichandra Siddhant Chakravarti

1000 A.D.

4. Dravy-anuyog - Philosophy

This anuyoga consists of the following texts which contain philosophical doctrine, theories, metaphysics, Tattvajnan, and like literature.

Niyamasar Kunda-kunda 100 A.D.

Panchastikaya Kunda-kunda 100 A.D.

Pravachanasar Kunda-kunda 100 A.D.

Samaya-sara Kunda-kunda 100 A.D.

Tattvartha-sutra Umaswami 200 A.D.

commentary by Samantabhadra 600 A.D.

commentary by Pujoyapad 700 A.D.

commentary by Akalank 750 A.D.

commentary by Vidyanand 800 A.D.

Aptamimamsa Samantabhadra 600 A.D.

commentary by Akalank 750 A.D.

commentary by Vidyanand 800 A.D.

Summary:

The Jain literature which was compiled by Ganadharas and Srut-kevlis is known as Agam literature. These texts are the holy scriptures of the Jain religion.

The Agam Sutras show great reverence for all forms of life and strict codes of vegetarianism, asceticism, nonviolence, and opposition to war. The existing Agam Sutras are accepted as the authentic preaching of Lord Mahavir by the Svetambar sects, but the Digambar sect does not accept them as authentic.

Digambars follow two main texts (Shatkhand Agam and Kasay Pahud) and four Anuyogs (consisting of more than 20 texts) written by great Acharyas (scholars) from 100 to 1000 A.D.

The Jain literature which is not classified as Agam Sutras is known as Non-agam literature.

Summary of Jain Agams:

Ang-agams:

Ang-agams are the oldest religious scriptures and the back bone of Jain literature.

1. Acharang Sutra (Aayarang):

This agam describes the conduct and behavior of ascetic life. It also describes the penance of Lord Mahavir. This is the oldest agam from a linguistic point of view.

2. Sutratrang Sutra (Suyagdang):

This agam describes nonviolence, Jain metaphysics, and the refutation of other religious theories such as Kriyavada, Akriyavada, Ajnanavada, and Vinayavada.

3. Sthananga Sutra (Thanang):

This agam defines and catalogues the main substances of the Jain metaphysics.

4. Samavayanga Sutra:

This agam defines and catalogues the main substances of the Jain religion from a different perspective than the Sthananga Sutra.

5. Vakhya Prajnapti or Bhagavati Sutra (Viyah Pannati):

This agam explains the subtle knowledge of soul, matter, and other related subjects. 36000 questions and answers are presented in discussion form. It is the largest of the eleven Ang-agams.

6. Jnata Dharma Kathanga Sutra (Nayadhammakahao):

This agam explains Jain principles through examples and stories. This text is very useful in understanding the mode of Lord Mahavir's religious preaching.

7. Upasaka Dashanga Sutra (Uvasagdasao):

This agam explains the code of conduct of the ten lay followers (Shravaks) of Lord Mahavir. This agam is very useful for understanding the code and conduct of

ordinary people (Shravaka Dharma) in the Jain religion.

8. Antah Kradashanga Sutra (Anatagaddasao):

This agam tells the stories of ten sacred monks attaining liberation (Moksha) by destroying their karmas.

9. Anuttaroupa Patika Dashanga Sutra (Anuttarov Vaiya Dasao):

This agam contains the stories of an additional ten sacred monks who attained the top-most heaven, known as Anuttara heaven.

10. Prashna Vyakrana Sutra (Panha Vagarnai):

This agam describes the five great vows (mahavratas) and the five worst sins defined in the Jain religion.

11. Vipaka Sutra (Vivagsuyam):

This agam explains the results of good and bad karmas through several stories.

12. Drastivada Sutra:

The twelfth Ang-agam Drastivad is considered lost by all Jain Sects. The description which is found in the other Jain Sutras relating to Drashtivada indicates that this Ang-agam was the largest of all Agam Sutras. It was classified in five parts; (1) Parikarma (2) Sutra (3) Purvagata (4) Pratham-anuyoga and (5) Chulika.

The third part, Purvagata contained 14 purvas. They contain the Jain religion's endless treasure of knowledge on every subject. Some scholars believe that it was so named, the knowledge which existed before Lord Mahavira was called 'Purva'.

Upang-agams:

The scriptures which were created in relation to Ang-agams are called Upang-agams. They provide further explanation of Ang-agams.

1. Aupa Patika Sutra (Ovavaiya):

This agam describes the splendid procession (view) of King Konika when he visited Lord Mahavir. It also explains how a person can attain heaven in the next life.

2. Raja Prashniya Sutra (Raya Pasen Ijja):

This agam describes the story of Monk Keshi. Monk Keshi was the Ganadhara of Lord Parshvanath. He removed the doubts of King Pradeshi regarding the existence and attributes of the soul. Monk Keshi made the king a follower of the Jain religion. After his death, the king was born as a deva in heaven. He appeared from heaven to shower Lord Mahavir with unprecedented pomp and splendor. The thirty-two dramas (plays) described in this agam throw light upon the ancient dramatic art of

India.

3. Jivabhigama Sutra:

This agam describes the universe and the subtle description of all living beings (souls) of the universe. It gives very important information to the scholars of biology and botany.

4. Prajnapanana Sutra (Pannavana):

This agam describes the form and attributes of souls from a different perspective.

5. Surya Prajnapti Sutra (Surya Pannti):

This agam describes the Sun, the planets and the associated mathematics regarding their motion.

6. Chandra Prajnapti Sutra:

This agam describes the Moon, the planets and the associated, mathematics regarding their motion. Both of these upangas, the Chandra Prajnapti and Surya Prajnapati, sutras are very important in understanding the astrology of olden times.

7. Jambudveepa Prajnapti Sutra:

This agam provides a description of Jambudveepa. Jambudeepa is a place explained in Jain geography. It also provides information on ancient kings.

8. Nirayarvali Sutra:

This agam describes the story of ten princes. All ten princes fought with King Chetaka of Vaishali in cooperation with king Konika. King Chetaka was the son of the 10 princes' step-mother. In the end all ten princes went to hell after dying in war.

9. Kalpa Vatansika Sutra (Kappavadamsiao):

This agam describes the story of King Konika's children. They did not fight with King Chetaka in the war. They renounced the world and became monks. After their death, they went to heaven.

10. Pushpika Sutra (Puspiao):

This agam describes the previous lives of certain devas (angels) who worshiped Lord Mahavir.

11. Pushpa Chulika Sutra:

This agam describes stories similar to those in the Pushpika.

12. Vrashnidasha Sutra (Vanhidasao):

This agam explains how Lord Neminath convinced ten kings in the Vrashni region to follow the Jain religion.

Chhed Sutra Aagams:

The subject matter described in the Chhed-sutras is for ascetics and not for lay people. It provides the rule of conduct, punishment, and repentances for ascetics. It also explains how they can repent for their sins and mistakes.

1. Nisheetha Sutra (Nisiha):

This agam explains the procedure of repentance (Prayashchitta) in the form of punishment for the monks and nuns who have conducted themselves badly.

2. Vrahat Kalpa Sutra

This agam explains which of the ten kinds of repentance (Prayashchittas) is appropriate for a particular wrong-doing monks and nuns. It also defines in clear terms what is acceptable conduct for monks and nuns and what is not.

3. Vyavahara Sutra: *

This agam describes the system of confession for monks and nuns who fall from proper conduct. It explains the qualifications of the listening monk or nun and with what sort of feeling the confession should be made. It also explains what sort of repentance (Prayashchitta) the monk should perform. There are several other indication of the limits of ascetic life.

4. Dasha Shruta Skandha Sutra (Achardasha):

There are ten chapters in this Sutra. It contains the following information:

Chapter Subject

- (1) - 20 places of Asamadhi
- (2) - 21 major faults bringing weakness in conduct
- (3) - 33 Ashatanas of Guru
- (4) - 8 Sampadas of Acharyas and their kinds
- (5) - 10 places of Chitta Samadhi
- (6) - 11 Pratimas of layperson
- (7) - Pratimas of ascetics (monks and nuns)
- (8) - KALPASUTRA - (recited during the Paryushanas)
- (9) - 30 places of bondage of Mohaniya karma
- (10) - 9 Nida nas (Niyane)

5. Panch Kalpa Sutra: *

This sutra explains the daily rituals the monks and nuns have to perform. Only scattered chapters of this agam are now available. However, the commentaries (Bhashya and Churni) written about this agam by some elder monks are available.

6. Mahanisheetha Sutra:

This agam explains the process of confession and repentance (Prayashchitta) for monks and nuns. It explains the magnitude of pain one has to suffer if he or she breaks the fourth vow (chastity). It also describes and explains the conduct of good and bad monks.

Mool-sutras:

The scriptures which are essential for monks and nuns to study in the early stages of their ascetic life are called Mool-sutras.

1. Avashyaka Sutra:

The daily rituals or routines which it is necessary to perform during the day and night for the purification of soul are called Avashyaka. A description of the six routines (Avashyakas) are explained in this agam. The six routines are; Samayika, Chaturvinshatistava, Vandanaka, Pratikramana, Kayotsarga, and Pratyakhyaana.

2. Dasha Vaikalika Sutra

This agam briefly describes and explains the conduct of ascetic life.

3. Uttaradhyayana Sutra

This agam has the same place in Jain literature as the Dhammapada in Buddhism and the Geeta in the Hindu religion. It contains preaching regarding religious principles and practices, and many stories, dialogues, and examples based on such principles and practices.

4. Ogha Niriyukti or Pinda Niriyukti Sutra: *

This agam explains certain rules and procedures for monks with respect to travelling, staying, accepting food and other necessities from lay people.

Chulika-sutras:

The scriptures which enhance or decorate the meaning of Ang-agams are known as Chulika-sutras or some times known as Sutras.

1. Nandi Sutra:

This agam contains an elaborate description of Tirthankaras, Ganadharas, and five types of Knowledge (Jnan); Mati, Shrut, Avadhi, Manaparyay, and Keval-Jnan.

2. Anuyogadvara Sutra:

This agam provides the description of many rights regarding the mode of preaching.

Prakirna-agams:

The scriptures which describe independent or miscellaneous subjects of the Jain religion are known as Prakirna-sutra.

1. Chatuh Sharana: *

This agam contains prayers to the four benevolent beings:

Arihant - God in the form of perfect human being

Siddha - God in the form of pure consciousness

Sadhu - 11 ascetics

Dharma - Religion

2. Aatur Pratyakhyana (Aayur-Pachakhana): *

This agam explains differences in the death of children, youths, adults, and old people. It also describes the types of vows a wise person should take during various states of illness and how he should beg the pardon of all living beings in the universe.

3. Bhakti Parijna (Bhatta-parinna): *

This agam describes the process of fasting and how one should reflect at the time of death.

4. Sanstaraka (Santhara): *

This agam describes the process of dying by one's own desire (Santhara) and its glory.

5. Tandulavaitalika: *

This agam describes the state of pregnancy and provides knowledge about the human body.

6. Chandra-Vedhyaka: *

This agam describes the method of concentrated meditation (Dhyana) that one

should observe through the description of Radhavedha.

7. Devendra-Stava: *

This agam describes the names, positions, and residences of Devas (angels) who live in heaven. It also provides a description of the moon, sun, planets, and stars.

8. Ganita Vidya: *

This agam describes palmistry and how it is used to predict the future (Nimitta).

9. Mahapratyakhyana: *

This agam explains how to completely give up the worst sins and how to repent these sins.

10. Veerastava: *

This agam is considered lost. However, it appears from literature referencing this agam that it contained prayers of Lord Mahavir.

Note: * These 13 Agams are not recognized by the Sthanakvasi and Terapanthi Svetambar Jain sects.