

Chapter I -

Explanation

Authorship - Authorlessness

The Agams, also called the Jain Shrut, are as important in the JainDharma as are the Vedas in Brahmanic religion and the Pitakas in Buddhism. The thinkers of the Mimamsa branch of Brahman philosophy considered the Vedas to be eternal and hence demonstrated them to be authorless, while the thinkers of the Nyaya-Vaishesik and the other branches of the same philosophy maintained and demonstrated that the Vedas are composed by God. But if we ponder a little over these two views, we at once realize that the purpose behind them is one and the same. It suggests that the date of the composition of the Vedas was not known. On the other hand, the Buddhist Tripitakas and the Jain Agams were composed by human beings, not by 'God,' and their date of composition is known to history.

Man loves what is old. This was one of the reasons why the Vedas were believed to be authorless. Some might have run down the Jain Agams, saying that they are new and have no ancient basis. To this the Jain reply was that our twelve Anga Agams (an 'Anga' being a 'limb'), collectively called Dvadsangi or Ganipitaka, were at all times in the past, are in the present, and will be at all times in the future. They are eternal, firm, permanent, non-destructive, non-decaying and everlasting' (1).

The logic behind this Jain answer is as follows:

From the transcendental standpoint, Truth is one. However from the standpoint of different time, space and human beings, it is manifested in various ways, but through all these manifestations there runs one eternal truth.

If we concentrate on the eternal truth and pay no attention to its various manifestations, then we must say that any person who has conquered attachment and aversion, and thus become a Jina always preaches the eternal truth about conduct, equanimity, universal affection and friendship, and the eternal truths on thinking, namely, the principle of relativity, principle of non-oneness. There is no time when there is an absence of this eternal truth. Hence, from this standpoint, the Jain Agams can well be described as beginningless and endless, that is, they are as authorless as are the Vedas.

At one place (2) it is said that there is a vast difference among the body structures of the twenty four Tirthankars, beginning with Lord Rishabha and ending with Lord Mahavir. However, there is no difference whatsoever with regard to their endurance,

bodycomposition, wisdom, omniscience, and so on. Hence there cannot be any difference in their preaching.

Another point worthy of note is that all the modes of all the things that are to be preached are beginningless and endless. The totality of all the modes; past, present, and future, of all things is always the same. Therefore, the Omniscient persons, who know these modes in their totality, preach them in different ages of time, but their preachings will never differ on account of the difference of time. Therefore, it is again said that the Agams, are beginningless and endless they are eternal.

Corroborative statements about the uniformity of the preachings of all the Tirthankars are found in the scriptures also. The Acharang Sutra declares⁽³⁾ that the teachings of all the Tirthankars belonging to the three divisions of time; past, present, and future are basically uniform. They all teach, “Do not kill any living beings, or overpower them, or enslave them, or harass them, or drive them away.” This is the religion, which is eternal, firm, everlasting, and demonstrated in precept and practice by virtuous persons.

But if from the empirical standpoint we ponder over what form in which the Truth was manifested, who manifested it, and when and how the manifestation took place, then the Jain Agams are proven to be a creation and consequently composed by human beings. Thus they do have their author, they are not authorless. Hence the scriptures declare;

“Having climbed the tree of perfect knowledge, an omniscient Lord Tirthankar showers flowers of knowledge to enlighten principal disciples, called Ganadhars. They collected all these flowers in the cloth of the intellect, and have interwoven them into the garland of Dvadsangi” (4).

Thus the two views, one of authorship and the other of the authorlessness of the Agams get well synthesized and the principle of relativity finds its fulfillment here.

On determining the validity of the Agams from the Listener's and

Speaker's Point of View:

The test of goodness of anything depends on the measure of its spiritual merit. For this reason, from the absolute standpoint, Jain scriptures could be 'invalid' (Mithya Shrut) if a person were to make their use in fostering vices, while, on the other hand, the any other religious scriptures (Vedas, Bible, Kuran, etc) are considered 'valid' (Samyak

Shrut) if a person desirous of liberation were to utilize them in illuminating the path leading to it.

From the empirical standpoint, the Jain scriptures are nothing but a collection of the essentials of the teachings of Lord Mahavir (6).

In substance, this means that the absolute standpoint mainly keeps the listener in view while determining the validity of the scriptures, and the empirical standpoint mainly keeps the speaker in view while determining the same.

A sentence or a word written in scriptures has no knowledge or consciousness. However, it possesses the power to convey the meaning with which it is conventionally related. It may mean or express different meanings to different people. In such a situation, from the absolute standpoint, the validity of a sentence or a word is not intrinsic but extrinsic. That is, it depends on the merit of the speaker as well as of the listener. Therefore, it becomes inevitable for one to consider the validity of the scriptures from the speaker's standpoint and from the listener's standpoint. The Jain consideration of the validity of the Agam from both these standpoints is presented below.

The composition of scripture has a specific purpose of showing the listener the path of true happiness and liberation. This is accepted by all Indian thinkers. Usefulness or harmfulness of scripture does not depend on words but does depend on the merit of the person who listens to words. This is why the philosophical thinkers formulate divergent doctrines including mutually opposed meanings in the same scriptural statement.

There are many mutually opposed philosophical doctrines derived by different thinkers using the same scripture such as done in case of Bhagavad Gita and Brahma-sutra of Vedic religions.

Hence, from the listener's standpoint, to call a particular book absolutely valid or invalid or to call a particular book Agam would be quite misleading. Considering this point, the Jain thinkers adopted a very broad and cohesive view according to which whatever doctrine fulfills the ultimate purpose of life is a valid Agam; the ultimate purpose is to assist each living being in its efforts to attain liberation. According to this point of view, all scriptures including the scriptures of other religions are accepted by Jains.

The person whose faith is rational will certainly utilize any book that comes before him in illuminating the path of liberation; hence, for him all scriptures are valid. But for the person whose faith is perverse, that is, who does not desire liberation, not only

are the scriptures of other religions invalid but so are the Jain Agams. In this attitude adopted for the determination of validity of scriptures, there is persistent devotion to truth without a sectarian attachment to scriptures of one's own faith.

Now let us consider the validity of scriptures (Agam), made from the speaker's standpoint, that is, the empirical standpoint. From this standpoint, all the works included in the group of Jain Agams are valid Agams. In other words, all those works that are regarded by the Jains as their own scriptures are included in the group of valid Agams; and the works which the Jains regard as their Agam do not include works of other religions such as the Vedas etc.

Generally, if a scripture contains the statements of a self-realized person, it is called Agam Praman (7). But who is a self-realized person according to the Jains? It is said that one who has conquered attachment and aversion is a self-realized person, a Jina, or an Omniscient Lord. Hence the Jain Agams contain the teachings of Jinas.

The speakers of Jain Agams were self-realized persons, free from attachment and aversion, and possessed the direct perception of all entities with their modes. So there is no possibility whatsoever of any faults or defects in the content of the Agams, nor is there mutual contradiction or anything that stands contradicted by reason. Thus, primarily the direct teachings of Jina are regarded as the Jain Agam Praman. However secondarily the other works, based on the direct teaching books (Ang Agams) books also regarded as Jain Agam Praman.

There arises a question as to whether the Angs (the first twelve books of Agam) are the direct words of the Tirthankars. Have the Tirthankars themselves composed these Agam works?

Before answering this question it is necessary to clarify that the extant Agam works are the compilation of the Agams composed by the Ganadhars. Here, having pointed out the general belief of the Jains about the composition of the Agams, we shall further devote ourselves to the special consideration of the extant works.

The Jain traditional view answers the above question as follows. Having pointed out the fundamental principles of reality and conduct, Tirthankars have accomplished their objectives. As has been already shown, the Ganadhars or the Acharyas give these principles the form of a composition. It clearly follows that the author of the teachings embodied in the composition is Tirthankar, while the Ganadhars authored the word form of Sutra composition.(9)

When it is said that the Tirthankar authored the Agams(10), what is meant is that he is the author of the meaning, not of the Sutras. From this exposition it is clear that the

Jain Agams handed down to us in the Ganadhars' Sutra form are valid because the Tirthankars, the authors of their meanings, are free from attachment and are direct seers of all entities with all their modes.

According to the Jain tradition, like the Agams preached by the Tirthankars, even those preached by a Pratyeka-buddha (11) are valid (Praman) (12).

The twelve Anga works composed by the Ganadhars are not the only works included in the entity called Jain Agam. Other works which were not composed by Ganadhars are also revered as a part of the sacred literature, as it is a traditional view that the Ganadhars only composed the twelve Angs. The other canonical literature (Anga-bahya) were composed by Stathviras or elder monks.

Such Sthavirs are of two types; Shrut-kevalis (one who comprehends the entire Shrut-14 Purvas) and Das-purvis (one who has acquired knowledge of the ten Purvas). Shrut-kevalis, are those who are especially well versed in the meaning and essence of the Agams. Therefore, whatever they will say or write could never contradict the Agams. Their objective is to compose works which expand upon or a bridge the scriptures, according to the needs of the society of their times. Since the Jinas expounded the subject matter, the Jain Order has naturally and without any hesitation included their works in the entire 'Jin-agam.' Of course, the validity of their work is on account of their being non-contradictory to the Agams composed by the Ganadhars.

One of the reasons given to support the view that one who has acquired knowledge of the entire Scripture can never be contradictory to the words of a Kevalin (an omniscient, enlightened human being). Also that not all things are capable of becoming an object of words. Only some part of all the objects of the Tirthankar's knowledge become the object of his work. And one who acquires knowledge of the written scripture can thus 'say' what the Tirthankars had said (16). From this standpoint, there obtains no difference between a Kevalin (the Omniscient) and a Shruta-kevalin (the Knower of the entire Shrut). Here, their validity is of equal strength.

Chronologically, 170 years (162 years according to another view) after Lord Mahavir's nirvan, the Jain Order became devoid of any shrut-kevalis and there only remained those versed in the knowledge of the ten Purvas. Jains believe that only those persons who know and comprehend the Purvas can be the spiritual practitioners having rational faith (Samyak Darshan) (17). Hence in their works there is no possibility of there being present anything that may go against Agam. This is the reason why their works also gradually got included in the Jain Agam.

Eventually, other precepts, though not supported by the Ang scriptures, but simply constituting the approvals given by the wisest Sthavirs in regard to some subject are also included in the Ang-bahya Agams. Even several muktaks (detached stanzas embodying relieving wisdom) are also given place in the Ang-bahya Agam (18).

On the question as to whether adeshes and muktaks are included in the Agam, the Digambar tradition is silent. But both the Digambar and the Svetambar traditions agree on the point that all the works composed by Ganadhars, Pratyek-buddhas, Chaturdas-purvis and Das-purvis are included in the Agams.

From this discussion it is clear that, from the transcendental standpoint, truth manifestation takes place in the conscious soul, not in the unconscious word. Hence, the pages of a book are important only in so far as they can serve as a means to spiritual development. With this standpoint all the literature in the world can be acceptable, or Upadeya, to the Jains because, for a judicious soul, seeking and finding the required spiritually beneficial material is relatively easy. But for an injudicious soul this same path of regarding all the world's literature as acceptable is fraught with dangers. Therefore, Jain sages have shown only the selected works from the entire world literature to be Upadeya and placed them in the Jain Agam.

The fundamental principle for selection is that the preachings of only that subject which the speaker has directly seen, as it is, can be acceptable; likewise, that subject should have been described as it is in the preaching if the same is to acquire the characteristic of acceptability. No narration is regarded as valid if its roots are not in such a preaching or if it is contradictory to such a preaching.

The words of one who, though not directly seeing things as they are, but who hears, directly or indirectly, the truth, are to be regarded as valid (Praman). Such a hearer, being either a Shruta-kevalin or Das-purvis, has no right to say things unheard from the above mentioned right seer.

In short, the words or narration could be regarded as valid/authentic only if someone had the true experience (true perception) of what is narrated in words, as Agam is that Praman which is rooted in true experience. According to this principle, the adesh which we have already mentioned cannot be included in the Agam.

The Digambers maintain that within a period of time after the Nirvan of Tirthankar Mahavir, the entire Agam preached by him became extinct. This is the reason why they did not find it necessary to include the adeshas in the Agam. But when the Svetambers tried to preserve the Agams, having compiled them, they found many things which have come down from ancient Acharyas through oral tradition which were not fundamentally based on the preachings of the Tirthankar; with a view to

preserving such things they placed them in the Jain Agam; and calling them adesh or muktak, they suggested their difference from the Agams of the other type.

Foot Note

1) See introductory description of 12 Anga works, occurring in

SamavayAnga; and

Nandi Sutra 57.

2) Brihatkalpabhasya, 202-203.

3) AcharAnga, Adhyay-4, Sutra-126,

SutrakritAnga 2.1.15, 2.2.41.

4) Avashyaka-niryukti

tavaniamanarukkham arudho kevali amiyana

to muyai nanavutthi bhaviyajavanibohanatthea

tam buddhimaena padena ganahara ginhium niravana

titthayarabhasiyam gamthanti tao pavayanattha

5) Anya-yoga-vyava-cchedika - 5.

6) Nandi Sutra 40-41; Brhat gatha 88.

7) aptopadesah sabdah/Nyaya Sutra 1.1.7; also Tattvarthabhasya

1.20

8) Nandi Sutra 40.

9) attam bhasai araha suttam ganthanti ganahara niumam

sthiyatthai tao suttam pavatte Ava. Ni.

10) Nandi Sutra 40.

11) A Pratyekabuddha is one who attains Kevalajnan (enlightenment, omniscience) without listening to the teachings of others but only through pondering over any event occurring in the world.

12) suttam ganaharakathidam taheva patteyabuddhakatha*****

13) *****

14) In the Jain Agam curriculum, the fourteen Purvas which form a part of the twelfth Anga were placed last on account of their deep meaning. So, the meaning of Chaturdasapurvi

(possessor of knowledge of the entire Shrut (sampurnashrutadhar). According to the Jain tradition it is clear that Bhadrabahu was the last who possessed knowledge of these fourteen Purvas.

Sthulabhadra learned from him the same, but following the order of Bhadrabahu he could teach others the first ten Purvas only. Hence after Sthulabhadra there flourished Jain monks who possessed knowledge of those ten Purvas only. Titthogaliya, 742;

Avashyakachurni, Part II, P.187.

15) Brihatkalpabhasya, gatha 964.

16) Ibid 963, 966.

17) Brihatkalpabhasya 132.

18) Brhat. 144 with a foot note thereon; Visheshavashyakabhasya, gatha 550.