

## Chapter II

### Obstructions to their Preservation

It is a wonderful feat of the Indians to have composed and preserved the Vedas. Even today one can come across hundreds of Brahmans who can recite from memory, without any error, the entire Vedas from the beginning to the end. Though they do not have the tradition of the meaning of the Vedas, they do have the tradition of Veda-recitation.

Jains too had made strong efforts in the past to preserve their Agams. However, the form in which the Ganadhars had compiled the teaching of Tirthankar Mahavir is not available to us today. Its language being Prakrit, it is quite natural for its language to undergo changes. So, Jain monks could not preserve the Anga Agams word for word as the Brahmans could do with regard to their Vedas. In addition, they completely forgot several works and made the state of several other works perverse or corrupt. Yet, we can certainly say that a large portion of the extent Anga Agams is very near to the actual teachings of the Lord Mahavir. Although there have taken place changes in those teachings and though even additions have been made, we cannot say that the preaching as we have it is totally new, i.e., mentally imagined. It is so because the Jain Order has often made sincere efforts to protect and preserve the entire Shrut. History as a witness to it, we cannot ignore these efforts.

Could the obstructions that caused the destruction of the Jain Shruti in the past, not destroy the Vedas? What is the reason why the Vedas, which are even more ancient than the Jain canon, remain well preserved, while much of the Jain Agams got destroyed or lost? The answer to this is easy.

In the preservation of the Vedas, lineages of two types have extended their cooperation. In the birth-lineage, the father teaches his sons, and the later their sons, the Vedas; and in the learning-lineage, the teacher teaches his pupils, and they their pupils; and thus they continued, without any interruption, the tradition of Veda-recitation.

But in the preservation of Jain Agams the birth-lineage has no place whatsoever. Father teaches the Agams not to his son but to his pupil alone. Hence attempts were made to keep the tradition of the Jain Shruti alive through the learning lineage alone. This very deficiency is the cause of the disorder of the Jain canon. There was no difficulty for the Brahmans to secure a well learned son and similarly a well learned pupil; but for the Jain Shraman, his well learned son was not necessarily entitled to read and to learn the scriptures, if he himself were not a

Shraman, while a less educated Shraman, though not his son, is entitled to read and to learn from him the Shrut.

Again, preservation of the Vedas was done by one special class whose self interest was in their preservation only. Preservation of the Jain Shrut is not dependent on any one special class. Any one is entitled to read and to learn the scriptures provided he becomes a Shraman. Moreover, a Brahman who has a birth right to learn the Vedas cannot escape from the obligation entailing this right. That is, in the first stage of his life, it was obligatory for him to study the Vedas; otherwise he had no place in Brahmanic society. Contrary to this, though a Jain Shraman possesses the right to study the Jain Shrut, he cannot enjoy his right on account of certain reasons. For a Brahman, the study of the Vedas was everything, while for a Shraman it was the good conduct that was everything. Hence, even if some dull-witted pupil could not study the entire Shrut, there would be no obstruction of any sort in his attainment of emancipation (Moksha), and his present life also passed easily without any obstruction whatsoever on the strength of this good conduct.

In daily practices there is no special use of the Jain Sutras. Since there is possibility of the path of liberation being illumined through the study of Samayik Pad (daily meditation and thought purification) alone, is there any wonder if very few persons attempted to acquire the knowledge of the entire Shrut? Most of the Vedic hymns are employed in rituals of various types, while only very few Jain Sutras are meant to be used in the daily practices of the Shraman. There is a possibility of being immersed in the ocean of the Jain scripture, only if a Shraman has special interest in knowledge for the sake of knowledge; otherwise, without knowing much of the Jain Agam he cannot enjoy the nectar of Shraman life. The Jain Shramans could have penned down their Agams, given them book form, and thus preserved them; this would have relieved them of burdening their memory. But they thought that the act of penning down involved the violation of the vow of non-attachment and non-possessions. Such a violation was unbearable to them. In the act of penning down Agams and giving them book form (the form of written documents) they found lack of self-discipline and self control (19).

When they made liberal the vow of non-attachment and non-possessiveness, they had already forgotten much of the Agams. The possession of books (pustak-parigraha), which they had formerly considered to be the cause of the lack of self-discipline and self-control, was now thought to be the cause of both (20). They totally changed their attitude towards the possession of books because otherwise there was a fear of the destruction of the Shrut. But what could they do now? What they had lost could not be recovered and regained.

Of course, this benefit did accrue that whatever wealth of the Agam which was still extant at that time remained protected and preserved. No more damage to it took place. For the sake of the preservation of the Shrut, the rules of Shraman conduct were made liberal. Exceptions to the rules of conduct were formulated, keeping in view the objective of the preservation of the Shrut. Now more importance was attached to the study of the Agams in the daily practices. Though they did all this, they could not remove the original deficiency: they did not formulate an exception to the general rule that the teacher can teach the Agams to his Shraman pupils and none other. Hence, is there any wonder if the knowledge of the Shrut disappears with the death of the teacher in the absence of his Shraman pupils? Due to several reasons, especially the severe penances and very hard ascetic life of a Jain Shraman, their numerical strength has remained meager compared to that of the Shramans belonging to the other ascetic orders, such as the Buddhists. In such a situation, is there any wonder if the Agams written down in Valabhi leave aside the Agams orally extant could not be preserved?

Foot Note

19) pottaesu gheppamtaesu asamjamo bhavai/Dasavai Churni p.21

20) Kalam puna paduccha charanakaranattha avocchitti nimittam cha  
genhamanassa potthae samhamo bhavai; Ibid p. 21.