

Language and Literature apart from art and architecture constitute the most important records of the cultural history of a country. Hence, the study of the Agamas is bound to reveal the most important observations of Jainism and its contribution to Indian culture.

As we all know, the collective term given by the Jainas to their Sacred literature is called Agamas written in Prakrt just as the Buddhist Pitakas in Pali and the Brahmanical Vedas in Sanskrit. The Jaina Agamas like the Buddhist Pitakas contain the sermons of their founders. They were later on codified by their trusted disciples into the languages of the people just for the larger benefit of the masses. Thus the original Sacred Books of both the Jainas and the Buddhist were written in Prakrt, i.e., Ardhamagadhi and Pali respectively. Being missionaries, their mission was to interest not only the intellectuals but the common people and hence they used the language of the common man. Down from the days of Arya Raksit (2nd Century of Vikram Samvat) and Uma Swami (3rd Century of V.S. ), there has been equal interest in Prakrt and Sanskrit so much so that both these languages became the common and combined treasures of the Jaina. Naya, the Jainas have adopted other regional languages also like Kannada and Tamil in South India, Gujarati and Marathi in Western India and even Hindi in Central India for the propagation of their religious teachings or literary pursuits.

Pt. Sukhalaji has divided the entire extent of Jaina philosophical literature broadly into four periods beginning with the Agamic period. Notwithstanding the differences in the two tradition of Digambaras and Svetambaras, the Jainas generally agree that the Agamas constitute the inspired wisdom of Lord Mahavir, when he attained perfection and Omniscience. The sermons were later on codified by his chief disciples called Ganadharas. According to the Jaina tradition, there are only two types of persons, who are qualified to know the secrets of religion - the Omniscient (Kevalin) who directly perceive everything of all places and of all times. Then lectures of sermons by the Kevalins themselves. They are called Sruta Kevalins. Acarya Yati Vrsabha has given the chronological account of the Missionary (Acarya) tradition of 683 years after the Nirvana of Lord Mahavir having 3 Kevalins, 5 Sruta Kevalins, 20 different orders of Acaryas.

According to the Svetambara tradition, the last compilation of the Agamas had been done at Valabhi after 980 years of the death of Lord Mahavir at the time of Devardhi, however the compilations of some of the Agamas were done at Pataliputra also which was after 250 years of Lord Mahavir's death. The Agamic literature is vast and stupendous, comprising of 12 Angas, 12 Upangas, 4 Mulas, 2 Chulikas Sutras, 6 Cheda Sutras, 10 Prakirnakas etc. The commentation on these Agamas are called Niryuktis and Bhasyas, which are in poetry style and those in prose style are called Curnis. Available Niryuktis, are said to be compositions of Bhadrabahu, the Second, which contain subtle philosophical discussion on the problems of existence of soul, analysis of knowledge and meaning etc. The Bhasyas contain the fuller accounts of all subjects. Sanghadas Gani and Jinabhadra are the two famous Bhasyakaras. Jinabhadra was a versatile genius, who has written practically on all subject under the sun. Sanghadas Gani has limited himself to the task of dealing with the problems of epistemology and the ethics of the Jain Sadhus. Among the Curnikaras, Jinadasa Mahattara is a notable figure. Curnis are shorter commentaries in prose on the pattern of Jatakas. In Sanskrit, the oldest commentaries of the Agamas is of Acarya Haribhadra (757-857 V.S.) next to whom are Silanka Suri (8th Cent. V.S.) and Sandhacarya, Abhayadeva and Malladhari Hemacandra and last but not the least Malayagiri. All these scholars wrote their commentaries in Sanskrit and Prakrt but they were so vast and deep that shorter commentaries in the languages of the people was considered essential. Hence, we find the composition of many primers and Beginner in regional languages like Taba in Gujarati. Acarya Dharma Singh is said to be an important author of such Beginners and Primers.

According to the Digambara tradition, all the old Agamas are said to have lost except the 12th called Drstivada. They regard Bhadrabahu as the last Sruta Kevali, with him out of 14 Purvas, 4 were lost. After Bhadrabahu, the different Acaryas became the teachers of 11 Angas and 10 Purvas and the process of disintegration continued up till 683 years after Mahavir's Nirvana. An important Acarya named Dharasena initiated his two most, able disciples, named Puspadanta and Bhutabali into the Agamas, who later on compiled the Sermons in the form of a monumental epics of religion called, Sat-khanda-gama in Prakrt. A contemporary of Acarya Gunabhadra compiled Kasayas-Pahuda upon which Yati Brsabha wrote a

commentary in Prakrt after he learnt it from Arya Mansku and Nagahasti. There are quite a few commentaries on these two monumental treasures-Satkhandagama and Kasaya-pahuda. The last of the commentaries on Satkhandagama called Dhavala is by Virasena, which comprises 72 thousand verses. The commentary on Kasaya-pahuda, called Jayadhavala is equally monumental having 20 thousand verses written by Virasena and 40 thousand added by his disciple Jinasena. The final portion of the Satkhandagama is called Mahabandha which has 41 thousand verses. This has been composed by Bhutabali himself. Fortunately, all those three monumental Agamas are treasured at Mudabidri's temple library. Acarya Nemichand Siddhanta Sastri Chakravarti of the 10th century was supposed to be an authority on these three Agamas. He had composed Gommatasara and Labdhisara to give the essences of these Agamas. Todaramala has written commentaries upon Gommatasara and Labdhisara in Bhasa. Acarya Kunda-kunda's Samayasara, Pravacanasara, Niyamasara and Pancastikaya-sara are in acknowledged Prakrt works which are regarded as good as the Agamas by the Jainas. Jainacarya Umaswati wrote Tattvartha-Sutra, which is regarded as the Veritable Bible of the Jainas by both the sects. The legend of the propagation of Jaina religion rests with the Tirthanakars and their disciples called eleven Ganadharas, who are said to have converted a community of 4411 Sramanas from whom the entire Jaina community has grown.