

## **The Jain Agamic Perspective on SDG 16: Peace and Justice Unveiled in Ācārāṅga**

### **Sūtra's Śāstra Parijñā**

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### **Abstract**

The United Nation(UN) and its member countries adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. The seventeen SDGs are part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development focusing on Poverty, Planet, People, Peace, and Prosperity while balancing Social, Economic, & Environmental Sustainability.

SDG-16 endorses peace, justice, and strong institutions respectively stressing on the need to reduce violence, implement proper framework for law, and establish unbiased, inclusive governance.

This paper explores how these core objectives of SDG-16 are viewed through the lens of Jain canonical literature, specifically the Ācārāṅga Sūtra's first chapter Śāstra Parijñā. The first of the eleven Aṅga Āgamas, Ācārāṅga Sūtra is the basic scripture of Jain philosophy. The ethical and moral tenets within this Jain text provide profound wisdom on non-violence (ahiṃsā), self-discipline, and righteous governance. By analysing the verses and their contemporary relevance, this research highlights the connection between wisdom of ancient Jain Āgama and the aspirations of SDG-16. The text offers a timeless framework for achieving sustainable peace, justice, and inclusive governance.

**Keywords:** Ācārāṅga Sūtra, Śāstra Parijñā, Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs, SDG 16, Jain Āgama and “peace, justice, and strong institution”

### **Research Questions**

How does the ancient Jain scripture “Ācārāṅga Sūtra” endorse SDG 16's goals: peace, justice, and Strong Institution?

Are the principles from “Ācārāṅga Sūtra's Śāstra Parijñā” relevant and applicable in the context of contemporary issues of peace and justice?

Do the preachings of Ācārāṅga Sūtra suggest any useful approach to balance social, economic and environmental considerations?

#### Objective

The primary objective of this study is to explore and explain the ethical principles and philosophical insights embedded in the Śāstra Parijñā chapter of the Ācārāṅga Sūtra, and to examine their relevance and application to the global vision of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG-16).

Specifically, this study aims to:

Interpret the core teachings of the Śāstra Parijñā within the Ācārāṅga Sūtra, highlighting their focus on non-violence (ahiṃsā) and self-restraint (saṃyama).

Establish connections between Jain thoughts and the goals of SDG 16, particularly those addressing peace-building, reduction of violence, moral justice, and institutional integrity.

Analyse how the subtle messages from the verses can support the specific objectives underlying the SDG-16 goals, establishing how spiritual traditions like Jainism can contribute to the moral foundations of sustainable governance and peaceful societies.

#### Methods and Materials

To conduct this research following approach was followed:

- To study the SDG-16 goals and ancient Jain theory
- To derive the deeper meanings communicated through the verses
- To infer guidelines / actions that will impact the SDG-16 goals
- To extend the interpretations to seek finer guidelines that will have additional impact on the objectives identified within SDG-16

The following literature is referred through the study:

1. English and Hindi translations of Ācārāṅga Sūtra by Up-Pravartak Śrī Amar Muni, Editor Śrīcanda Sūrāṇa 'Sāras'
2. Ācārāṅga Sūtra - Part I by Madhukar Muni
3. Ācārāṅga Sūtra Āyāro Terāpantha Āgama 01 Ang 01 by Ācārya Tulsi
4. Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, United Nations, (2015)
5. Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, United Nations, (2015)

## Introduction

### Ācārāṅga Sūtra

All the teachings of Bhagavan Mahavir available today are based on the eleven Āṅga Āgamas. Of these eleven the first Āṅga is Ācārāṅga. The term "Ācārāṅga" itself signifies a scripture concerned with right conduct, and it serves as a spiritual manual guiding ascetics on the path of renunciation, self-restraint, and ethical living. The means and procedure for attaining liberation is given in Ācārāṅga. Ācārāṅga starts with a soul's curiosity. Then it proceeds to define various dharmas (duties), such as ahimsa, equanimity, detachment, alertness, simplicity, unitariness, tolerance, etc. Thus, this Sūtra contains an elaborate description of all facets of the process of attaining liberation.

Ācārāṅga is in two volumes (śrutaskandhas). The first book, with nine chapters, is of special importance with respect to language, style, subject-matter etc. In the context of ahimsā and equanimity, the first book deals with a subject of wider reach and usefulness for all. The first chapter with 7 lessons deals with varied and minute details about violent and non-violent conduct.

### Chapter One of Ācārāṅga Sūtra: Śāstra Parijñā

The title of the first chapter of Ācārāṅga Sūtra is 'Sattha Parinna' or 'The Truth About Weapons'. The means or instruments of violence are called weapons (shastra).<sup>1</sup> A thing capable of destroying another is a weapon for that.<sup>2</sup> The meaning of Śāstra -Prijna is to acquire knowledge of the form and instruments of violence, to understand about its bitter fruits and consequently abandon the same. To be free of violence or himsā is ahimsā.<sup>3</sup>

A discussion of topics like causes of violence, principles of non-violence (ahimsā) description of six life forms, proof of their being alive or animate, self-discipline (samyaṃ), torments caused by violence, bondage of karmas, and advise to avoid violence, righteous living (dharma) has been presented in the seven lessons of the first chapter. It lays the foundation of ascetic conduct and ethical behaviour, emphasizing the importance of internal purity and external non-violence as the highest virtues.

The chapter discusses:

1. The significance of non-violence (ahimsā) as the essence of righteous living

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<sup>1</sup> Ācārya Amar Muni (1999). Ācārāṅga Sūtra Part 1. Page 4

<sup>2</sup> Abhidhan Rajendra. Shabd Kosh Part 7. page 331

<sup>3</sup> Ācārya Amar Muni (1999), Ācārāṅga Sūtra Part 1. Page 4

2. The dangers of harming living beings, including the consequences of violent thoughts, words, and actions
3. The practice of self-restraint (samnyama), which leads to inner peace and societal harmony
4. The rejection of material attachment (aparigraha), which prevents greed and injustice
5. Truthfulness (satya) and ethical speech, as a means to prevent conflict and deception in society

### **SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions**

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, provide access to justice for all, and build accountable institutions.

‘Sustainable development cannot be realized without peace and security; and peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development.’<sup>4</sup>

This citation clearly shows the importance of building peaceful, just and inclusive communities. All citizens should have equal rights to seek justice from the perspective of humanity. The rights should include rights to development. The UN suggests all members to implement an effective law enforcement, transparent and accountable institutions, and good governance. The agenda stated by UN discourages inequality, corruption, poor governance and illegal money and arms trafficking as they are the main cause of violence. The agenda extends to recommend taking extra efforts to reduce conflict and also help the countries affected by such conflicts. Involving women in the process of creating a peaceful society and building the nation is expected in the SDGs agenda. It further requests the members to take steps to ensure compliance with the international law. We should step into help the people under colonial or foreign occupation to realize right of self-determination as they are severely affected in their economic and social progress.

### **SDG-16 Goals and Insights from Ācārāṅga Sūtra**

The United Nations Development Plan (UNDP) outlines the need for the goals stated in SDG-16 and gives a perspective of the realities. It further gives an approach to meet the goals. As stated in UNDP:

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<sup>4</sup> “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” United Nations, (2015). <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> . Accessed April 11 2025

‘We cannot hope for sustainable development without peace, stability, human rights and effective governance, based on the rule of law.’<sup>5</sup> As stated on the UNDP website, the world is still not unified, in fact it is more divided. While many countries enjoy serene, secure, and peaceful existence with thriving economies, there are others caught in the rut of conflicts and violence. This is avoidable and must be tackled.

The SDGs aim to assist the governments and communities to tackle the violence and settle the conflicts to establish secure environment. As part of the process, it is equally important to uphold the rule of law and human rights. Addressing money laundering and illegal flow of arms is an important aspect as well.

UNDP shares that millions of people are forcibly displaced because of persecution, conflict, violence and human rights violation. It mentions the corruption and bribery figures as trillions of dollars per year.

SDG 16 seeks to address violence, corruption, weak institutions, and lack of justice. It highlights the need for transparency, accountability, and peaceful dispute resolution to ensure a just and fair society. The core objectives of SDG 16 include:

- Reducing all forms of violence and related death rates.
- Ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and violence against children.
- Promoting the rule of law and ensuring equal access to justice.
- Reducing corruption and bribery substantially.
- Developing effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels.

### **Shastra Parijna: Ethical Foundations for a Just Society**

The Ācārāṅga Sūtra’s first chapter, Śāstra Prijna, discusses the discipline required for spiritual and ethical living.

#### **1. Ahimsa (Non-violence) as the Foundation of Peace**

- The text strongly advocates non-violence in thought, word, and action. It states: "Savve pana na hantavva, na ajjavetavva, na paritāvetavva." (All living beings should not be harmed, injured, or tormented.)

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<sup>5</sup> “Goal 16, PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS.” United Nations Development Program. <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/peace-justice-and-strong-institutions> . Accessed April 12, 2025.

## 2. Justice and Equality

- Śāstra Prijna emphasizes that justice should be impartial and based on righteousness
- Jain monks are advised to practice complete detachment, ensuring they are free from biases

## 3. Self-Discipline and Ethical Behaviour

- The sutra stresses self-restraint and adherence to ethical codes
- Deceitful behaviour with an intent of personal gain is condemned

**Contemporary Relevance and Application** The teachings of Śāstra Prijna offer practical wisdom for modern governance and social justice:

- Non-violent conflict resolution: Implementing Ahimsa in policymaking can lead to peaceful dispute resolution and inclusive governance.
- Transparency in institutions: The emphasis on ethical conduct and detachment from personal gain can strengthen honesty and accountability.
- Rule of law based on moral righteousness: Just as Jain monks practice non-attachment and fairness; institutions should uphold impartiality in law enforcement.

By integrating these principles, modern societies can build peaceful and just communities, fulfilling the aspirations of SDG 16.

Jainism, one of the oldest spiritual traditions, has long emphasized ethical living, non-violence, and self-restraint as the foundation of societal harmony. The Ācārāṅga Sūtra, an ancient Jain text, provides profound insights into disciplined living and ethical governance. The first chapter, Śāstra Parijñā, is particularly significant in outlining the principles of non-violence and justice, making it highly relevant to the objectives of SDG 16.

Examples of Verses Related to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) are discussed below.

### **Sutra 1 : Ācārāṅga Sūtra (1.1.2/3/4/5/6/7)**

“तथ खलु भगवता परिण्णा पवेदिता। इमस्स चेव जीवियस्स परिवंदण-माणण-पूयणाए, जाई-मरण-मोयणाए, दुक्खपडिघायहेउं। से सयमेव पुढविसत्थं / उदयसत्थं / अगणिसत्थं / वणस्सतिसत्थं / तसकायसत्थं / वाउसत्थं समारंभति, अण्णेहिं वा पुढविसत्थं / उदयसत्थं / अगणिसत्थं / वणस्सतिसत्थं / तसकायसत्थं / वाउसत्थं समारंभावेति, अण्णे वा पुढविसत्थं /

उदयसत्यं / अगणिसत्यं / वणस्सतिसत्यं / तसकायसत्यं / वाउसत्यं समारंभंते समणुजाणति। तं से  
अहियाए, तं से अबोहीए।”

Bhagavan has revealed the truth about this. When a person, for the sake of his life; praise, prestige and worship; birth, death and liberation; and removal of sorrows, (for these reasons) himself acts sinfully, causes others to act sinfully, or approves of others acting sinfully against earth-bodied beings / water-bodied beings / fire-bodied beings/ plant-bodied beings / mobile-bodied beings / air-bodied beings, that (sinful act) is detrimental to him. That is the cause of his ignorance (meaning that he always remains deprived of the awareness of right knowledge, perception or faith, and conduct).<sup>6</sup>

This verse is a spiritual and ethical mandate for non-violence in its deepest form. Non-violence encompasses both physical and psychological harm. It preaches not to commit, nor induce others to commit, nor support any violence. This verse teaches that true peace begins with personal restraint and refusal to cause or support harm to any form of life, even elemental beings. Violence, even for noble ends (self-liberation, survival, or fame), is rejected. Such act will always lead to inner peace and it will ensure that others are at peace. Hence it is an important foundation for the **peace for self and others**.

This sutra extends moral concern and justice not just to humans but to all beings, including: Earth-bodied (pudhavī-sattham) – stones, minerals, soil. Water-bodied (udaya-sattham) – aquatic forms. Fire-bodied (agaṇi-sattham) – light, heat entities. Plant-bodied (vaṇassaī-sattham) – vegetation. Mobile-bodied (tasa-kāya-sattham) – animals, insects. Air-bodied (vāu-sattham) – air-based beings.

This reflects **inter-species justice, promoting ecological balance and compassionate coexistence**

The verse outlines three levels of ethical responsibility: Personal Action: Doing the violent act oneself. Encouraging Others: Ordering, instigating, or influencing others. Approving Others: Turning a blind eye or expressing consent. Silence or approval of wrongdoing is not neutral, it perpetuates harm. In real life we do come across situations where the people witnessing a wrong doing, do not interfere and stop it. It is important that we take moral responsibility and

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<sup>6</sup> Ācārya Amar Muni (1999). English Translation by Śrīcanda Sūrāṇa. Ācārāṅga Sūtra Part 01. Page 21,36,47,56,65, 73.

try to stop such acts or resolve such conflicts. If an individual takes such a stand it will automatically get institutionalized and bring **institutional responsibility and accountability**. The verse ends with: “Taṃ se ahiyāe, taṃ se abohiyāe” – This leads to harm and causes one to remain in ignorance (a-bodha), If one is not even aware of the possible consequences of his/her stand towards violence and its effects (he/she is ignorant or ethically blind), it leads to **injustice and conflict**. **Creating awareness** around such ignorance is hence an important message as well.

This verse, though ancient, is remarkably relevant in today’s world. In brief, the verse provides fundamental behavioural aspects that can contribute to meet specific SDG-16 objectives:

<b>Jain Perspective from the Verse</b>	<b>SDG 16 Objective</b>
Non-violence towards all beings	Peaceful societies
No support for or approval of harm	Justice systems
Awareness of right knowledge and conduct	Ethical governance
Responsibility at all levels (doer, abettor, consentor)	Accountability

The verse teaches that peace and justice are not simply policies or slogans, but must be rooted in individual and collective consciousness in non-violence, self-awareness, and responsibility.

#### **Sutra 2: Ācārāṅga Sūtra (1.1.2.20 & 21)**

“जाए सद्धाए णिक्खंतो तमेव अणुपालिज्जा विजहिता विसोत्तियं। पणया वीरा महावीहिं।”

The verse means one who has renounced the world with faith (saddhā), must faithfully adhere to that very path. If one strays from it, one falls into confusion. But the wise hero (Vīra), through restraint, remains steadfast.

‘One should preserve, without the slightest diminution, the faith which one had at the time of renunciation, One should not be swept away by the eddies of mercurial mind. The valiant Sadhakas have dedicated themselves to the great Path.’<sup>7</sup>

When an ascetic, an aspirant of the Mokṣa, begins his journey he is very keen, particular and determined. Any dilution of this focus is not desired. But during this long journey towards Mokṣa, the ascetic may get slightly distracted or jumbled and his faith may reduce slightly. Hence the guru of such ascetic, suggests him to strengthen his faith continuously along the path. The doubts or mental distractions are major obstacles for the ascetic.

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<sup>7</sup> Ācārya Tulsi (1981). Ācārāṅga Sūtra Āyāro Terāpantha. Jain Vishva Bharati. Page 30, 31



This verse emphasizes steadfastness in faith and principles. It warns against hypocrisy or moral drift. Just as the monk must adhere to his path, so must the leaders, institutions, and citizens hold firm to justice, truth, and ethical governance thus building **Institutions based on inner integrity**. When those in power deviate from their vows or mission, confusion and societal breakdown follows.

The Vīra (hero) here is one who is disciplined, not violent. He embodies restraint, truth, and courage to persist in the right path even when it's difficult. In a world of temptations and shortcuts, the Jain ideal of the **self-restrained and consistent** hero is vital to nurturing just and inclusive societies.

The verse redefines "Vīra" (hero), not as a conqueror of others, but as one who masters the self. The inner strength plays a major role over external dominance, fostering peace through **inner transformation** and ethical leadership, not through power or domination.

SDG 16 calls for effective, accountable institutions, which are built on inner personal integrity. SDG 16 envisions justice not just as laws, but as a culture — where leaders and systems operate with **self-discipline and consistency**. This ideal of inner strength over external dominance mirrors SDG 16's goal.

Based on the teachings of the verse, the table below outlines a few parallels with SDG objectives:

Jain Perspective from the Verse	SDG 16 Objective
Inner Integrity	Accountable institutions,
Straying leads to confusion	Breakdown of justice systems
Inner transformation	Ethical and strong leadership
Self-restraint and Inner consistency	Just and inclusive society

This verse from Ācārāṅga Sūtra encapsulates a timeless truth: Peace and justice begin within, when individuals stay rooted in their principles, act with discipline, and live with integrity. In today's complex world, where institutions often falter due to ethical erosion, the Jain vision of heroic self-restraint and unwavering moral clarity offers essential guidance for achieving the noble aims of SDG 16.

### Sutra 3 : Ācārāṅga Sūtra (1.1.5.40)

“तं णो करिस्सामि समुद्धाए। मत्ता मतिमं अभयं विदित्ता। तं जे णो करए एसोवरए, एत्थोवरए, एस अणगारे त्ति पवुच्चति।”

‘He, who has taken the vow of ahimsa, should resolve, I will not commit violence once I accept ascetic-discipline. The wise should ponder (over the existence and suffering of the aforesaid beings) and realizing that every being desires to be free of fear (should desist from indulging in violence). He alone is rid of violence who does not commit violence. He alone is called anagar who is rid of violence.’<sup>8</sup>

This verse emphasizes conscious action driven by full **awareness (Matta)**, **wisdom (Matimā)**, and **fearlessness (Abhaya)**. To ensure lasting peace, one should not (individuals and institutions) act blindly or act with fear. They should act with courage and awareness. This ensures true peace, not just the absence of conflict.

"Samutthāya" denotes **determined actions with awareness**, as energetic effort with a clear, unwavering goal. Institutions (governments, courts, etc.) that operate with such clarity and resolve to maintain public trust. The verse's call for determined and wise action. It mirrors with SDG 16's emphasis on: Rule of law, Transparent decision-making, and institutional integrity.

"He who acts thus (has gotten rid of violence) is called sinless (Anagāra)." **Anagāra**: One who is without house, one who is detached, pure, and righteous. Such individuals lead with inner stability and unbiased justice.

"Abhaya" (Fearlessness) is not about aggression, but the confidence to stand in truth without causing harm. Jainism promotes **steadfastness** - ahimsā (non-violence), rooted in fearlessness and compassion, not cowardice.

SDG 16 envisions inclusive and peaceful societies, and this is only possible when leaders and citizens act without fear, but with non-violent strength. SDG 16 demands strong institutions and leaders who do not bend under pressure or personal gain. Jain philosophy highlights that only those free from fear, partiality, and attachment can uphold true justice. The table below summarizes the link between verses and the SDG objectives:

<b>Jain Perspective from the Verse</b>	<b>SDG 16 Objective</b>
Wisdom and fearlessness (मतिमं, अभयं)	Ethical leadership and rule of law
Determined action with awareness (समुद्राए, मत्ता)	Transparent, effective governance
Sinlessness and purity (अणगारे)	Justice, accountability, and integrity
Steadfastness (एसोवरए, एत्थोवरए)	Strong and stable institutions

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<sup>8</sup> Ācārya Amar Muni (1999). English Translation by Śrīcanda Sūrāṇa. Ācārāṅga Sūtra Part 01.52

**Sutra 4 : Ācārāṅga Sūtra (1.1.7.56)**

“पभू एजस्स दुगंछणाए । आतंकदंसी अहियं ति णच्चा ।

जे अज्झत्थं जाणति से बहिया जाणति ।

जे बहिया जाणति से अज्झत्थं जाणति ।

एयं तुलमण्णेषिं इह संतिया दविया णावकंखति जीवितं ।”

‘A disciplined person becomes capable of abandoning violence against air-bodied beings, because he sees terror in violence and considers it harmful, He who knows the inner-self (spirituality) knows the outer (world). He who knows the outer (world) knows the inner-self (spirituality). Explore this comparison with self, ponder over this! Those (asthetics) who have found peace (pacified their passion) in this (Jain order) and are filled with clemency, do not wish to live by killing air-bodied beings. Such a balanced, equanimous one does not yearn for either life or death; he remains equanimous in all conditions.’<sup>9</sup>

The wise person consciously refrains from harmful actions, knowing they injure the soul. The Jain perspective goes beyond physical violence — it includes violence in thought, speech, and intention. **Avoidance of harm to soul or body** will inherently mean being considerate, and non-provocative.

The verse says: "He who understands the self, understands the world" and vice versa.

This is a call to holistic wisdom — the kind of deep, empathetic insight. Such **understanding of inner and outer realities**, is much needed to resolve conflicts and unite the society.

The line "does not crave life or death" reflects a high level of **equanimity**. Such a person remains stable, unbiased, and fair, not swayed by personal gain or fear of loss.

"**Tulamāṇṇesim**" means measuring with balance. It means acting with even-mindedness and fairness. A peaceful society thrives only when judgments are made without bias and based on truth

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<sup>9</sup> Ācārya Amar Muni (1999). English Translation by Śrīcanda Sūrāṇa. Ācārāṅga Sūtra Part 01. Page 69.

### **Jain Perspective from the Verse**

Avoidance of harm to soul and body  
Understanding inner and outer realities  
Equanimity (not craving life or death)  
Tulamañnesim – Balanced assessment

### **SDG 16 Objective**

Peaceful societies, reduced violence  
Justice with empathy and deep insight  
Impartial, resilient leadership  
Strong, fair institutions and rule of law

This profound verse teaches that the path to peace and justice begins within. Avoid harm consciously, reflect deeply, remain equanimous and fair. It will help in building just and harmonious society, as envisioned by SDG-16.. For strong institutions the verse urges the leaders and citizens to reflect inwardly, understand diverse perspectives and act rationally.

### **Conclusion**

The first chapter of the Ācārāṅga Sūtra offers timeless wisdom through several deeply thought principles such as complete non-violence, respect for all life forms, full awareness, mindfulness, fearlessness. The Ācārāṅga Sūtra states fundamental qualities that need to be fostered and propagated across the world. It's focus is on non-violence, self-discipline, and justice. It aligns with **SDG 16's goals of promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions.**

Bringing these ethical teachings into practice is an important aspect. The policies formed by the governments and the laws established by them could be derived based on these fundamental qualities to foster a cultural change, so that the societies can move towards a more peaceful, just, and sustainable future. This is exactly what SDG 16 seeks to address: fostering transparency, conscious leadership, informed citizens, and unbiased justice.

By applying these timeless Jain principles, modern societies can foster a culture of integrity, transparency, and peaceful coexistence, paving the way for sustainable development and universal well-being.

### **Limitations of the Study:**

The study attempts to establish a connection between the ethical and philosophical views of the first chapter, Śāstra Parijñā of Ācārāṅga Sūtra and the global vision of peace, justice, and strong institutions represented by SDG 16. While several inferences are derived as part of the study, it is important to acknowledge the following limitations:

- This study is primarily focused on the Ācārāṅga Sūtra, and particularly on the Śāstra Parijñā section. Other canonical texts such as the Sūtrakṛtāṅga, Dasavaikālika, or

Uttarādhyayana Sūtra and other religious texts offer many perspectives on peace, justice and governance but are not considered as part of this study.

- The original Prakrit verses are complex and open to multiple interpretations. This study has relied on available translations and commentaries which may reflect the subjective leanings of the authors. Subtle messages from original language may remain partially unexplored or under-represented.
- Applying these ancient spiritual ideals directly to political institutions and governance systems (e.g. law, international relations) may require further interdisciplinary study.
- While the insights are reflective, they are not analytically validated. Analytical validation can be taken up as a separate project.

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