

Jainism In Mathurā In The Early Centuries Of The Christian Era

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THE importance of Mathurā as a centre of Jainism in the early century of the Christian era is evident from the vast mass of Jaina inscriptions recorded on *āyagapaṭas* or tablets of homage, statues of Jaina Tirthaṅkaras and fragments of a Jaina *stūpa* recovered from the famous Kaṅkāli Tīlā in Mathurā in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It appears that this Tīlā or mound from where these remains were recovered was a Jaina sanctuary from the period of the Śuṅga dynasty, as is evident from an inscription¹ written in the Śuṅga type of the ancient Brāhmī. It continued in the time of the Guptas, as brought out from a record² dated in the year 97 which, on paleographic grounds, appears to be the late Gupta period. The mound, symbolising the ancient Jaina sanctuary, is reminiscent of the once flourishing Jaina *Sanḡha*, comprising of the monks, nuns, *śrāvakas* and *śrāvikās*. It is rather an unusual feature to trace certain names, which appear to be of foreigners. The records are probably dated in the Indo-Parthian

1 H. Lüders, *Mathurā Inscriptions*, unpublished Papers, ed. by K. L. Janert, p. 42. From the inscriptions at the site it appears that there was a Jaina sanctuary from the period of the Śuṅga dynasty.

2 *Ibid.*, No. 23, p. 53.

era³, and so the donors appear to be foreigners who had come to Mathurā and accepted Jainism. This assimilation of the foreigners in the fold of Jainism belies the notion that Jainism was confined only to the land of its origin. The famous story of Kālakācārya⁴, the Jaina saint who brought about the downfall of the Gardhabhilla dynasty through the help of the Śakas of Seistan, points to the contacts established between Jaina saints and foreigners, some of whom may have been attracted to it.

Mathurā, known as Saurīpura or Sūryapura to the Jainas⁵ seems to have been frequented by the Jaina monks from the north-east, i. e., from Magadha, after the famous famine described in the Jaina scriptures. The Jainas established themselves there about the middle of the second century B.C. The Āmohinī Tablet⁶ is a shining example of the existing nature of Jainism in the first century B.C. The inscriptions from Kaṅkāli Tīlā also mention some unfamiliar names like Akakā and Oghā⁷—names of ladies, probably of foreign origin—whose dedications speak of their acceptance of Jainism.

The composition of the Jaina religious orders into several schools known as *gaṇas* with their different *kulas* and *śākhās* and *sambhogas* is brought out by the records of the Kuṣāṇa period which is corroborated by the evidence from the *Kalpasūtra*. The three prominent *gaṇas*—being Koṭṭika⁸, Vāraṇa⁹ or Cāraṇa and Arya-Uddehikīya¹⁰. Another one *Vāsavadiya* is implied with reference to its *kula* mentioned in a record.¹¹ The different *kulas* associated with the Koṭṭika *gaṇa* were Brahmadāsika, Ṭhānīya, Vacāliya and Prabāhaka (Praśnavāhanaka) with their corresponding *śākhās*—Ucenāgarī, Aryavairī or Vairī and Majhmiā. The heads of the Aryavairī were Āryya Puśila (Ārya Puṣyala) and Vṛhatavācaka Jayamitra in the years 12 and 20¹² respectively of

3 Dr. Bhandarkar Volume, p. 288.

4 Vikrama Adventures, Introduction.

5 SBE, XLV, p. 112.

6 EI, II, p. 204, No. 20.

7 Lüders' List of Inscriptions, Nos. 48, 29, 43.

8 Ibid., Nos. 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 25, 27, 28, 29, 33.

9 Ibid., Nos. 18, 34, 37.

10 Ibid., No. 21; IA, III, p. 105, No. 23.

11 EI, I, p. 282, No. 2.

12 EI, II, p. 203, No. 18; EI, I, p. 383, No. 4.

the Kuṣāṇa era. The Koṭṭika *gaṇa*, according to the *Kalpasūtra*¹³, was founded by Suṣṭhita and Supratibuddha, surnamed Kauṭika and Kākandaka. It was divided into Ucenāgarī, Vidyādhari, Vajrī and Mādhyamika *śākhās* and Brahmaliptaka, Vatsaliya, Vaṇīya and Praśnavāhanaka *kulas*. This school continued to exist in the Gupta period as it is mentioned in an inscription dated in the year 113¹⁴ of the Gupta era. It refers to the setting up of an image by Śyāmāḍhya under instructions from Datilācārya of the Koṭṭiya *gaṇa* and Vidyādhari *śākhā*.

The head of the Cāraṇa or Vāraṇa *gaṇa* of the *Kalpasūtra* was Āryadatta in the year 29¹⁵ and a little more than twenty years later its great preacher was Dinārya. This school was divided into four *śākhās* and seven *kulas*. The *gaṇa* was founded by Śrī Gupta of the Hari *gotra*, according to the *Kalpasūtra*. A good many *śākhās* and *kulas* of this *gaṇa* or school are noticed in the Kuṣāṇa records as, for example, Puṣyamitrika, Āryacetaya, Kāmajāsika, Petivāmika and Arahaṭṭiya. Some *kulas* are, however, left out.

The Ārya-Uddehikīya *gaṇa* with its Nāgabhūtiya *kula* identified with Nāgabhūya *kula* of the Uddeha *gaṇa* had Buddhaśrī as its head in the year 7¹⁶ and Devadatta in the year 90¹⁷ of the Kuṣāṇa era. This *gaṇa* was founded by Ārya Rohaṇa of the Kāśyapa *gotra* and was divided into six *kulas* and four *śākhās* out of which only two *kulas* are mentioned in records.

The Mehika *kula* of the Vāsavadiya *gaṇa* was founded by Kāmarāhi of the Kuṇḍala *gotra*. It is mentioned in a record of the year 15.¹⁸

These *gaṇas* or schools with the different *kulas*, *śākhās* and *sambhogas* created an atmosphere of good will and there is hardly any instance of bitterness in their relations with each other or with Buddhism and Brahmanism, the two other flourishing religions at Mathurā. Out of the records of dedications of statues of Jaina

13 SBE, VIII, p. 231.

14 EI, II, p. 210.

15 EI, II, p. 206, No. 26; *Ibid.*, No. 36. For the division of this *gaṇa* into *kulas* and *śākhās*—see *Kalpasūtra*, VIII, p. 320. For a study of the Jaina *gaṇas* see also Bühler : *The Indian Sect of the Jains*.

16 EI, I, p. 391, No. 19.

17 IA, XXXIII, p. 105, No. 23.

18 EI, I, p. 282, No. 2.

Tirthaṃkaras, including half-a-dozen dated ones, associated with the last one Mahāvira, two refer to the setting up of four-fold image (*Sarvatobhadra-pratimā*), and one each record the setting up of statue of Śāntinātha, Sāmbhavanātha, Ṛṣabhanātha and Munisuvrata. The statue of Vardhamāna was set up for the Koṭṭiya *gaṇa* and the Brahma-dāsika *kula* in the year 5¹⁹, and for the Sthānīya *kula* of the same *gaṇa* in the years 20 and 35²⁰. The three statues of Vardhamāna were meant for the Vāraṇa *gaṇa* and Petivāmika and Puṣyamitrika *kulas* in the year 22, 29 and 50²¹. The donors were mostly pious female devotees. The same *gaṇas* were also associated with the setting up of statues of other Tirthaṃkaras, and sometimes the donor was the same, as, for example, Dattā dedicated an image of Ṛṣabha in the year 60, and earlier in 49²² she had set up an image of Arhat Munisuvrata. A statue of Sarasvatī was consecrated at the instance of the preacher (Vācaka) Āryadeva of the Koṭṭiya *gaṇa*.

Some of the records refer to the setting up of statues of Jaina Arhats whose names are not mentioned, tablets of homage (*āyagapaṭas*) and pillars. Jainas, no doubt, consecrated images of their Tirthaṃkaras—the earliest instance being that of the image of Ṛṣabhadeva which was taken away by the Nandarāja, and brought back by King Khāravela of Kalinga.²³ Kauṭilya also refers²⁴ to the images of Jaina gods—Jayanta, Vaijayanta, Aparājita and others. Thus, the antiquity of Jaina image worship could be pushed to about the 4th century B.C. There is no record of the setting up of statues of all the twentyfour Tirthaṃkaras in the Kuṣāṇa period. That of Pārśvanātha is clearly distinguished by a canopy of snake hood over his head.

Lay devotees were responsible for these dedications done at the instance of some teacher or preacher. These devotees include both male and female lay-hearers—some of them belonging to the professions of iron-mongers (*lohakāra*), carpenters (*vardhakin*) and perfumers (*gāndhika*).²⁵ Courtesans (*gaṇikas*) also shared in these

19 *EI*, I, p. 381, No. 1.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 305, No. 27; p. 386, No. 7.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 391, No. 20; p. 385, No. 6; Vol. II, p. 206, No. 36.

22 *EI*, II, p. 204, No. 20.

23 Lüders' *List*, No. 1345.

24 Bhattacharya—*Jaina Iconography*, p. 37.

25 Lüders' *List*, Nos. 53, 54, 55, 10, 20, 53, 1907, 37, 39, 76, 102.

dedications. It seems that caste factor did not figure in the Jaina religious order. We hear of saint Harikesin Bala hailing from a Cāṇḍāla family.²⁶ Thus, even men of low birth could aspire for a high status through intellectual attainments. Nor were dedications by fallen but religious-minded women wanting. If Buddha could accept the hospitality of the famous courtesan of Vaiśālī—Ambapālī, we have an interesting example of the setting up of a shrine (*devakula*) of the Arhat Vardhamāna, a hall of homage (*āyagasabhā*), a reservoir (*prapā*) and stone slabs (*śilāpaṭa*) in the Arhat temple of the Niganthas, by the lay-disciple of ascetics (*samānasāvika*), the courtesan (*gaṇikā*) Nādā-Vasu, daughter of the courtesan Ādā Loṇasobhikā²⁷, together with some of her relatives, for the worship of the Arhats.

The Jaina devotees also set up tablets of homage (*āyagapaṭas*)²⁸ with the Yogi type of the seated Jina, the highly ornamented *triśūlas*, and sacred symbols. One tablet gives an interesting view of a Jaina *stūpa* enclosed in a railing with a gateway (*torana*). These *āyagapaṭas* or tablets of homage were set up for the worship of all Arhats, invoking their blessings. The Jainas also raised *stūpas* over the ashes of a chief or religious leader.

These numerous items of dedication were part of the activities of the Jainas in Mathurā who catered to the wishes of the Jaina preachers from different schools and families. The Tirthaṅkaras enjoyed the respect and adoration of all the schools. Among the preachers whose names appear in more than one record are—Arya Baladina, Ārya-Deva, Ārya-Kṣeraka, Mihila and Nāgadatta.

The role of women as nuns (*śiṣyīṇī*) or lay devotees (*śraddhācarī*) was fairly important. The latter had not renounced their family ties, but were deeply religious and firm. They created endowments. There are many references to Jaina nuns. The heads of schools had female disciples receiving religious instructions. Okhā of an earlier record, probably an Indo-Parthian, Āmohinī of the Kṣatrapa period, Kumāramitrā, Vasulā, Saṅghamikā, Jinadāsī, Balavarmā and Devā²⁹ contributed a lot as members of the Jaina order—dedicating themselves and persuading others in the path of religion. There is no reference to a female preacher in the records.

26 *Uttarādhyayana Sūtra*, 12. 1.

27 Lüders' *List*, No. 102.

28 *EI*, II, p. 190, No. 2; p. 202, No. 5; *EI*, II, p. 396, No. 23.

29 Lüders' *List*, Nos. 39, 24, 70, 50, 48, 28, 47.

It is rather interesting to notice foreign elements in Jainism. It has been suggested earlier that about the first century B.C. there were certain Parthians who had accepted Jainism and set up dedications. Okharikā and Ujhaṭikā do not appear to be Indian names, while Dimitra could be the Indianised form of Demetrius. The inscriptions from the Kaṅkāli Tīlā, supposed to represent the site of some Jaina establishment³⁰ also mention some unfamiliar names, like Akakā and Oghā.³¹ It is, therefore, very likely that foreigners too were accepted in the Jaina fold which had also eliminated caste-consciousness in the choice of the selection of head of religious schools.

Mathurā continued to be an important centre of the Jainas in the Gupta period. In fact the Kaṅkāli Tīlā, symbolising the Jaina monastic establishments, is supposed to have met its fate at the hands of the Mohammadan invader Mahmud of Ghazni, who invaded this sacred city and destroyed everything that came in the way of his iconoclastic zeal.

30 See Smith—*The Jaina Stūpa at Mathurā*, Pl. LXII; cf. Janert, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

31 Lüders' *List*, Nos. 48, 29, 43.

