An Unpublished Medieval Image of Bhagavan Aranatha from Bhagalpur

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Bhagavan Aranatha, the eighteenth Jaina Tirthankara, is not widely known to the students of the Jaina art. He was born at Hastinapura. His father, Sudarsana, was a ksatriya prince of the Lunar Dynasty (Chandravansi). His mother's name was Mitrasena. Bhagavan Aranatha like some other Jaina Tirthankaras became a Cakravarti before becoming a Tirthankara. The sacred tree peculiar to him is Cuta or Mango. His complexion was of golden colour and he was of 20 dhanusga in height. Kumbha and Rakhiya were his chief disciples. His attendants consisted of the Yaksa named Yajnendra and the Yakshi named Bharini Devi. His symbol i.e., jaya jaina was mandalavarta (a kind of swastik) or a fish which come under the eight auspicious symbols. He attained nirvāṇa on the Mount Sammaya (Parsvanath Hill, Bihar) at the age of 84,000 years.

Historically the saga of Bhagavan Aranatha can be traced back as early as the Kusana period. The well known Mathura Image Inscription records the dedication of a Nandivarta (Nandyavarta) at the 'Vedya' stūpa. The stūpa was built by the gods (devamātā) due to the best

2 Ustara Purana, p. 225.
3 Ibid.
4 Kalpasutra, p. 183.
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efforts of Sravika Dina at the request of Monk Vṛddhahasti who belonged to the Koliya gaṇa and Vairā śaṅkā. The Jaina literature such as Bṛhat-kalpa-bhāṣya and Vyavahārābhaṣya of Sanghadassagani Kṣamasramana (8th century A.D.) refer to a devanirmita stūpa at Mathura. The great Jain saint Jinabhadragani (6th century A.D.) visited this place. The date of this inscription was read as year 49 (circa 127 A.D.). This devanirmita stūpa was dedicated to Bhagavan Aranatha whose lāṃchana is a nandavyāvartha. This most important Jaina inscription of Mathura proves the popularity of this Jina during the Kusana period.

Bhagavan Aranatha obtained the name Ara because Queen Mitrasena, his mother, saw a dream of a wheel (uṣṇīsa) of jewels while he was in the womb.

It is important to note that not a single sculpture of Bhagavan Aranatha have come to light from the province of Bihār which is treated as most sacred land in the Jaina pantheon. The author of this paper who is working on Jainism in the Eastern Bihār, however, traced a singular sculpture of Bhagavan Aranatha at Bhagalpur recently. The town of Bhagalpur (ancient Campa) needs no introduction to the Jaina community. Here Bhagavan Vyasupūja attained the pancakalyānakas and it was the place of ancient Jaina temple (Pārṇabhadra caitya) of Bhagavan Parsvanatha. The image of Bhagavan Aranatha in question have been enshrined in the Digambara Jaina Temple, Bhagalpur. It is carved of white marble stone and measures 10 x 6 inches. It is inscribed which records its donation by one Govinda Raja, in the samvat 1533 (circ. 1476 A.D.). The Jina is seated in padmaśana in yogimudrā. His curly hair in upaśīja style, long ears, half closed eyes, śrīvatra mark upon chest testify his Jinahood. The lāṃchana depicted in the middle of the pedestal is a fish instead of a nandavyāvartha.

From the aforesaid discussion, it is clear that the image of Bhagavan Aranatha enshrined in the Bhagalpur Temple is of great archaeological importance.

5 Vividhatirthakalpa, p. 19.
6 Epigraphia Indica, Vol. IV, pp. 244 t.
7 Uțara Purana, p. 205.
10 Samavayang, p. 6.
11 Sūpapadika Sutra, p. 10ff.