



An Unpublished Medieval Image of Bhagavan Aranatha from Bhagalpur

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Bhagavan Aranatha,¹ the eighteenth Jaina Tirthankara, is not widely known to the students of the Jaina art. He was born at Hastinapura.² His father, Sudarsana, was a ksatriya prince of the Lunar Dynasty (Candravamsi).³ 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 *dhanuṣa* in height. Kumbha and Rakhiya were his chief disciples. His attendants consisted of the Yakṣa named Yajsendra and the Yakṣini named Dharini Devi. His symbol i.e., *lāṅkāna* was *nandyavarta* (a kind of *svastika*) or a fish which come under the *aṣṭamaṅgalas* or eight auspicious symbols. He attained *nīrvāṇa* on the Mount Sammeya (Parsvanath Hill, Bihar) at the age of 84,000 years.⁴

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 'Vodya' *stūpa*.⁵ The *stūpa* was built by the gods (*devanirmite*) due to the best

¹ Bhattacharya, B. C., *The Jaina Iconography* (New Delhi-1984 reprint), pp. 53-54.

² *Uttara Purana*, p. 285.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Kalpasutra*, p. 183.

⁵ *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. II, p. 204, No. 20.

efforts of Sravika Dina at the request of Monk Vrddhahasti who belonged to the Koliya *gaṇa* and Vaira *śākhā*. The Jaina literature⁶ such as *Bṛhatkalpabhāṣya* and *Vyavahārabhāṣya* of Sanghadāsagani Ksamasramana (8th century A.D.) refer to a *devanirmite stūpa* at Mathura. The great Jaina saint Jinabhadragani (6th century A.D.) visited this place.⁷ The date of this inscription was read as year 49 (circa 127 A.D.).⁸ This *devanirmite stūpa* was dedicated to Bhagavan Aranatha whose *lāñchana* is a *nandyāvarta*. 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 Mitra-sena, his mother, saw a dream of a wheel (*ara*) of jewels⁹ 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 Bihar which is treated as most sacred land in the Jaina pantheon. The author of this paper who is working on Jainism in the Eastern Bihar, however, traced a singular sculpture of Bhagavan Aranatha at Bhagalpur recently.¹⁰ The town of Bhagalpur (ancient Campa)¹¹ needs no introduction to the Jaina community. Here Bhagavan Vasupujya attained the *pancakalyāṇakas*¹² and it was the place of ancient Jaina temple (*Pārṇabhadra caitya*)¹³ of Bhagavan Parsvanatha. The image of Bhagavan Aranatha in question have been enshrined in the Digambara Jaina Temple,¹⁴ Bhagalpur. It is carved of white marble stone and measures 10×6 inches. It is inscribed which records its donation by one Govinda Raja, in the samvat 1533 (circa 1476 A.D.). The Jina is seated in *padmāsana* in *yogīmudrā*. His curly hair in *uṣṇīṣa* style, long ears, half closed eyes, *śrīvatsa* mark upon chest testify his Jinahood. The *lāñchana* depicted in the middle of the pedestal is a fish instead of a *nandyāvarta*.

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

⁶ *Prakrit Proper Names*, Vol. II, p. 589.

⁷ *Vividhatirthakalpa*, p. 19.

⁸ *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. IV, pp. 244 t.

⁹ *Uttara Purana*, p. 205.

¹⁰ Roychoudhury, P. C., *Bihar District Gazetteer, Bhagalpur* (Patna-1962).

¹¹ Palit, D. P., *The Antiquarian Remains in Bihar* (Patna-1963).

¹² *Samavayanga*, p. 6.

¹³ *Aupapadika Sutra*, p. 10ff.

¹⁴ Sinha, A. K., *Jaina Shrines in Bhagalpur, Jain Antiquary*, Vol. 36 (Arrah-1983), pp. 22-23.