
A Recently Discovered Jaina Pedestal Inscription of Sarada Script from Kangra Fort, Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract: Jainism, popularly known as Jain Dharma is a spiritual, religious and philosophical tradition of Indian origin and most of the scholars agree that its antiquity goes back to Vedic times. Archaeological remains of Jainism are found in most of the Indian states and Himachal Pradesh was also an important centre of Jainism during past as it is evident from the discovery of many sculptures and antiquities from Himachal Pradesh. Recently a number of sculptures were recovered near Kangra fort, among them a beautiful inscribed sculpture of Rishabhanatha was also recovered which is discussed in the present paper.

Keywords: Tirthankara, Himachal Pradesh, Sculpture, Rishabhanatha, Inscription, Sarada, Puravadhā

Introduction

The present inscription is engraved on the pedestal of the broken image of a Jaina *tirthankara* (Figure 1), found outside the historical fort at Kangra (Latitude 32° 5' 14" N, longitude 76° 17' 46" E), in Kangra district, Himachal Pradesh. It was found along with several other Jain sculptures and is now preserved in the Kangra Art Museum at Dharamshala, the district headquarters. From the *lanchana* depicted on the pedestal and also from the inscriptional evidence, the image can be identified as Rishabhanatha, the first *tirthankara* in Jainism.

Kangra Fort

The historical town of Kangra was known in ancient times as Nagarkot/Nagarakotta and was ruled by the Katoch Rajputs till the advent of the British. The ancient Kangra fort stands at the eastern extremity of the town atop a precipitous rock rising to a height of 440 feet, above the bed of Banganga River and dominating the whole valley. The fort has both Brahmanical and Jaina temples.



Figure 1: Broken Jaina Image with Inscription on the Pedestal

1 क्ष(क्षे)त्रियु पुरावढहु भन
2 दानउ [गु]नभरित प्रति-
3 मा ज्येष्ठ निज व 5 हि प्प्र-
4 भ[व*] पुण्यक्ष(क्षे)त्रे रिषभनाथ-
5 स्य श्री जिनप्रिय शिष्य-
6 ण जिनभद्रेण सुरिण
7 . [ण]रभण सिद्धांत वि-
8 प्रति[ष्ठित]

Figure 2: Text of Inscription

The Inscription

The inscription is written in 8 lines in Sarada characters of about 13th century A.D (Figure 2). In spite of space constraints, the scribe has managed to engrave the letters exhibiting

beautiful calligraphy. Both angularity and curvature can be seen. Unfortunately beginning portion of the 8th line and a part of 7th line is damaged beyond reconstruction.

Regarding the origin of Sarada script, it is well known that it has evolved from the Brahmi alphabet used in the north-western parts of the Indian sub-continent in the 9th century A.D. and it is still being used among the older generation of the Priestly class, in the Kashmir region (Deambi 2008). In the Kangra region, only few records of this script were found so far¹. Hence the present inscription is a valuable addition.

A mixture of Apabhramsha dialect and Sanskrit language is used in the inscription. One of the prominent features of Apabhramsha dialect i.e. replacement of vowel sound *a* by *u* in final syllables can be seen. Orthographical error can be seen in line 1 and 4, in which instead of *kshetra*, it was engraved as *kshatra*.

Observations and Conclusion

The purport of the inscription is to record the installation of the image of Rishabhanatha, of fine quality (*gunabharita*) at this sacred place (*punya-kshetra*) by Jinabhadra Suri, a disciple of Sri Jinapriya, probably for the merit of Puravadha Jaina community of the region (name not mentioned). The record mentions that the image was donated for installation on the 5th day in the dark half (*bahula*) of the Jyestha *nija* month, in the cyclic year Prabhava.

The Jains of Puravadha community (presently known as Parwar or Paravara) are inhabitants of Bundelkhand region, which was an ancient centre of Jainism having many prominent Jaina *tirthas*. They are mostly followers of Digambara sect of Jainism and are also named as Pragwata, Porawalanvaya, Parawala, Porawada, Porawala, Paravada, etc. Poets like Pandita Sridhara (12th century A.D.) in his work *Sukumala Cariu* and Dhanapala (14th-15th century A.D.) in his work *Bahubali cariu* refers to this community as Puravada in the *prasasti* portion of their work.

It is known that the ancient town of Nagarakotta was a famous centre for Jaina pilgrimage. Jaina literature like *Kharataragaccha-Gurvavali* proves that there was a temple of Santinatha at Nagarakotta in the 13th century A.D. Poet Jayasagara (1426 A.D.) in his *Vijnaptitriveni* mentions this place as a *mahatirtha* and refers to the temples of Santinatha, Mahavira, Adinatha and Neminatha. The *Nagarakotta Caityaparipati* of Jayasagara also mentions these four Jaina temples (Jain, 2010).

In this connection it is not surprising that the donor of the image i.e. Jinabhadra Suri, who is a member of Puravadha Jaina community became a disciple of the Jaina pontiff Sri Jinapriya at Nagarakotta and caused to make and install the image of Rishabhanatha *tirthankara*. A number of inscriptions² refer to the activities of this community in far off regions and it shows the importance given by the Jains for performing *caityaparipati* (i.e. visiting various temples during festival days) and making donations, construction works, etc., for acquiring religious merit.

Notes

- ¹ Important among them are the Baijnath prasastis I and II, dated Saka 1126 (1204 A.D.) and a pedestal inscription of Jaina tirthankara Parsvanatha, dated in Laukika samvat 330 (1254 A.D.).
- ² For example an inscription discovered from the Satrunjaya hill at Palitana, in Bhavanagar district of Gujarat, dated Vikrama 1685 (1627 A.D.), written in Sanskrit language and Nagari characters, refers to the members of Puravada-jnati as patrons who caused to construct a devakulika at the hill.

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