

## Kuṣāṇa Period: The Glorious Epoch of Jaina Religion (With special reference to inscriptions)

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The Kuṣāṇa era marks an important epoch in Indian history. The Kings of Kuṣāṇa, they provided extreme religious freedom to their subjects. Jainism spread far and wide during this period and flourished with sister religions in a very amicable environment. It is an era when each and every person of the society from the common man to the King, was free to profess a religion of his choice. Inscriptions which throw a flood of light not only on the smooth progress of this religion but also on socio-economic activities of contemporary period. Most of the Jaina inscriptions are badly broken or mutilated, nevertheless, they bear the historical significance, henceforth, need to be evaluated.

These inscriptions are small and fragmentary in nature, but enough to show the gradual development of Jaina church organization. The Jaina monks, nuns, lay-men and lay-women are presented in these inscriptions. In fact, the inscriptions with their respective *Gaṇa*, *Kula*, *Śākhā* and *Śikhiya* are already referred to in the *Kalpāsūtra*. Later, the literary and epigraphical sources provide the one and the same information which are elsewhere scarcely to be seen. We, however, do not hear the name of Śvetāmbara and Digāmbara in any inscription. It appears to be certain that final split was not taken place till this period. Further, these inscriptions enrich our knowledge regarding the hierarchy of church organization.

It is remarkable to note here that these *Gaṇas*, *Kulas*, *Śākhās* existed in the Kuṣāṇa period are similar to the names mentioned in the *Sthavirāvalī* of the *Kalpāsūtra*.

The eminent Indologist John Buhler has shown this similarity in his famous book on the Indian Sect of Jainas<sup>1</sup>. According to him, out of the eight *Gaṇas* mentioned in the *Sthavirāvalī* of the *Kalpāsūtra*, three or possibly four existed in Mathura during the Kuṣāṇa period.

Kuṣāṇa Period: The Glorious Epoch of Jaina Religion ... : 57

For example, the *Kalpāsūtra* mentions eight *Gaṇas* as Cārana Gaṇa or Vāraṇa Gaṇa, Godāsa Gaṇa, Koṭiya Gaṇa, Mānava Gaṇa, Uddeha Gaṇa, Uduvādiya Gaṇa, Uttarabalissaha Gaṇa and the eighth Vesavādiya (Vesavātika) Gaṇa. Out of these eight *Gaṇas*, the Vāraṇa Gaṇa,<sup>2</sup> the Koṭiya Gaṇa,<sup>3</sup> the Odehikiya or the Uddehikiya Gaṇa<sup>4</sup> existed during the second century A.D. of the Christian era i.e. during the Kuṣāṇa period. Probably the Vesavādiya Gaṇa was also in the existence; though no reference of its name is found in the list of Mathura inscriptions. It's one of the *Kula* namely Mehika or Maṇihika has been inscribed in one of the inscriptions<sup>5</sup> and we know from the *Kalpāsūtra* that Mehika kula was one of the *Kulas* of the Vesavādiya Gaṇa.

Likewise, some *Śākhās* and *Kulas* inscribed in the inscriptions are similar to the names mentioned in the *Sthavirāvalī* of the *Kalpāsūtra*. According to it, the Vāraṇa Gaṇa<sup>6</sup> had four *Śākhās* and seven *Kulas*. The four *Śākhās* are mentioned as the Gavedhukā Śākhā, the Hāritamālāgārikā Śākhā, the Saṅkāsikā Śākhā, the Vajranāgarī Śākhā. Out of four *Śākhās*, three *Śākhās* namely 1- the Saṅkāsikā 2- the Vajranāgarī<sup>7</sup> (Vajranāgarī)<sup>8</sup> with slight modification in the name 3- Hāritamālāgārikā<sup>9</sup> were flourishing during the 2 century A.D. Out of the seven *Kulas* of the Vāraṇa Gaṇa mentioned in the *Kalpāsūtra*<sup>10</sup> as 1- Vatsallīya 2- Pritidharmaka 3- Hāridraka 4- Puṣyamitraka 5- Malyaka 6- Āryacheṭaka 7- Kṛṣṇaśākhā, mostly *Kulas* have been mentioned in the Mathura inscriptions. We find their names as 1- Ārya Hāttikiya Kula<sup>11</sup> 2- Puṣyamitriya kula<sup>12</sup> 3- Ārya Cetika kula<sup>13</sup> 4- Pritivarmika kula<sup>14</sup> 5- Ārya Bhista kula<sup>15</sup> 6- Ārya Kaniyāsikā kula<sup>16</sup> 7- Nādika or Nādika Kula.<sup>17</sup> In one of the inscriptions, Ārya Śikhiya Sambhoga<sup>18</sup> of the Vāraṇa Gaṇa has been mentioned about which we find no mention in the *Sthavirāvalī* of the *Kalpāsūtra*.

The Koṭiya or Koṭika Gaṇa is of historical value. According to the *Kalpāsūtra*,<sup>19</sup> it was founded by Ācārya Sūsthita and Ācārya Nupratibuddha, the disciples of illustrious Ācārya Suhasti and as John Buhler has pointed out, this *Gaṇa* originated in 250 B.C. and