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Some Buddhist Donors and Their Families

It is common place knowledge that the Buddhist orders of monks and nuns depended and depend on donations. Therefore it is no wonder that beginning with the oldest extant texts making gifts and acquiring merit is praised time and again. Innumerable donative inscriptions bear ample witness of the success of these exhortations. In order to document the merit made, donors are named together with members of their respective families, who wish to share the merit. This allows a rare glimpse of families in ancient India, not only of kings and princes, but also and more interesting of common people, on whom the presentation puts the focus. Larger families are only rarely described in some detail. Therefore, relevant inscriptions and some colophons from different times and regions of the Buddhist world in India and Central Asia are collected and discussed. It is intended to demonstrate that some information can be gleaned from this material about the overall size of families in Ancient India, the number of children etc. Small as the information available is, it can nevertheless contribute to a better understanding of certain aspects of the ancient Indian society. At the same time it will become clear how little is known on this subject otherwise, which underlines the value of the Buddhist evidence.