

Jaina Religion in Ancient Sri Lanka

Nilanthi Bandara*¹, Dr Dammi Bandara*², Manoji Harischandra*³

Jaina religion was one of the most popular religions that existed in ancient India. (It is well known as Jainism or Jainism which belongs to the Sramana tradition) The religious leader of Jainism is known as *Nigankanatha putta* or *Mahavira*. Buddhist literature too mentions about Jainism in certain occurrences. Jainism was the first ever religion which invaded the South Asian countries such as South India, Mysore and Ceylon.

Significant evidence can be found that can prove Jainism held an important place in ancient Sri Lanka. Local and foreign literary sources confirm the above fact. The main objective of this research is to discuss about the background of Jainism in ancient Sri Lanka based on the above sources.

There are no definite factors to confirm as to how and when Jainism commenced its practices in ancient Sri Lanka. But there is evidence that Jainism dominated an authentic position in ancient Sri Lanka during the period of king *Pandukabhaya*. It becomes clear from *Mahawamsa* records to the effect that monasteries had been constructed for Jainism nominees named *Jothiyagiri* and *Kumbanda*. The above statements prove that Jainism was the first ever religion which was accorded the royal patronage of ancient Sri Lanka.

Arrival of Arahant Mahinda Thera in Sri Lanka caused to create a new chapter in the history of ancient Sri Lanka. Buddhist doctrinal teachings evolved in the entire island effecting great influence on moral, virtuous and cultural lives of the citizens. Advent of Buddhism may have been strong enough to cause the decline of the powers of Jainism. King *Valagamba* destroyed the monastery named *Girinigantarama* and built up *Abhayagiri Viharaya* at the same place which act resulted in degrading the authority of Jainism. But it could be assumed that Jainism raised its head again from time to time due to occurrences that took place after the Kings of this country left for South India for protection with the invasions of Paundiyas and Cholas in Sri Lanka.

There is no doubt that such religious influences may have had an impact on the customs, literature and the language which proves by the addition of adverse and unpleasant words like nasty, gaudy and indecorous etc.

Keywords: Jainism, Sri Lanka, India, Buddhism, King *Pandukabhaya*,

*¹ Senior Lecturer, Department of Archaeology, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.

*² Research Assistant, Department of Archaeology, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

*³ Visiting Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.