

Jainism in Sri Lanka

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This paper focuses on the history of one of the greatest living religions, Jainism in Sri Lanka. Below given a brief introduction to discuss about the similarities which both Jainism and Buddhism share.

Buddhism and Jainism are the two branches of the Indian Āśrama ascetic tradition that developed in Magadha that still exist today. Mahavira and Gautama Buddha were probably contemporaries (circa 5th century BCE). Jainism and Buddhism share many features, including much of the same terminology and ethical principles such as nonviolence. Jainism and Buddhism also agree that it is possible to attain liberation from the cycle of births and deaths (samsara) through spiritual and ethical disciplines.

History

Buddhism separates itself from the Jain tradition by teaching an alternative to Jain asceticism. Buddhist scriptures record that during Prince Siddhartha's ascetic life (before attaining enlightenment) he undertook many fasts, penances and austerities, the descriptions of which are elsewhere found only in the Jain tradition. In *Majjhima Nikaya*, Buddha shares his experience:

“Thus far, Sari Putta, did I go in my penance? I went without clothes. I licked my food from my hands. I took no food that was brought or meant especially for me. I accepted no invitation to a meal.”

These are in conformity with the conduct of a Digambara monk. Ultimately, the Buddha abandoned reliance upon these methods on his discovery of a Middle Way. In Jainism, there exists a non-extreme pathway for āśvākas (lay practitioners) with minor vows. Some Buddhist teachings, principles, and terms used in Buddhism are identical to those of Jainism, but they may hold different or variant meanings for each.

Although both Buddhists and Jain had orders of nuns, Buddhist Pali texts record the Buddha saying that a woman has the ability to obtain nirvana in the Dharma and Vinaya. According to Digambara Jains, women are capable of spiritual progress but must be reborn as a man in order to attain final spiritual liberation. The religious texts of the Ājīvika mention that liberation is attainable by both men and women.

The Jain community (or Jain *sangha*) consists of monastics, *munis* (male ascetics) and *aryikas* (female ascetics) and householders, *Shrāvaks* (laymen) and *Srāvakīs* (laywomen).

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Buddhism has a similar organization: the community consists of renunciate bhikkhus and bhikkhunis and male and female laypersons, or *Srāvakas* and *Srāvikas*, who take limited vows.

Whether or not it was an influence of Jain culture and philosophy in ancient Bihar that gave rise to Buddhism is unclear, but there are some striking similarities between the two traditions and Buddhism may have adopted many of its ideas and traditions from preexisting ones held by the Jains, including calendrical systems.

In fact, it is even possible that among the surviving calendars today, the Buddha Nirvana calendar (with a zero point in 544 BC) may actually be significantly older than the Kaliyuga calendar. And so, quite possibly, is the Mahavira Nirvana calendar of the Jains (with a zero point in 527 BC).

Pâli Canon

The Pâli Canon does not record that Mahavira and Gautama Buddha ever met, though instances of Mahavira's disciples questioning Gautama Buddha are to be found in various suttas. The Buddhists have always maintained that by the time the Buddha and Mahavira were alive, Jainism was already an entrenched faith and culture in the region. According to the Pâli Canon, Gautama was aware of Mahavira's existence as well as the communities of Jain monastics

Buddhist texts refer to Mahavira as *Nigantha Jñâtaputta*. Nigantha means “without knot, tie, or string” and Jñâtaputta (son of *Natas*), referred to his clan of origin *Jñâta* or *Naya* (Prakrit).

The five vows (non-injury, truth, non-attachment, non-thieving, celibacy/chastity) propounded by the 23rd Jain Tirthankara, Pârœva (877-777 BCE), may have been the template for the Five Precepts of Buddhism. Additionally, the Buddhist *AEguttaranikâya* scripture quotes the independent philosopher Purana Kassapa, a sixth century BCE founder of a now-extinct order, as listing the “Nirgranthas” as one of the six major classifications of humanity.

Buddhist writings reflect that Jains had followers by the time the Buddha lived. Suggesting close correlations between the teachings of the Jains and the Buddha, the *Majjhima Nikaya* relates dialogues between the Buddha and several members of the “Nirgrantha community”.

Indian Buddhist tradition categorized all non-Buddhist schools of thought as *pâsanda* “heresy” (*pasanda* means to throw a noose or *pasha*—stemming from the doctrine that schools labelled as *Pasanda* foster views perceived as wrong because they are seen as having a tendency towards binding and ensnaring rather than freeing the mind). The difference between the schools of thought are outlined in the *Samaññaphala Sutta* of the *Digha Nikaya*.

Jainism is one of the three most ancient Indian religions along with Hinduism and Buddhism, which are still flourishing vigorously in South Asia and other parts of the globe. Although it shares a common linguistic framework and certain cultural aspects with Hinduism and Buddhism, it is a distinct independent religion. The name is derived from the Sanskrit verb “**JI**” meaning to conquer, to attain omniscience, enlightenment, purity through conquest of passions and bodily senses. It is based on Ahimsa, literally ‘Non-Injury’. A code of conduct barring injury, violence, destruction to all living creation - Jiva. Ahimsa is the first of the 5 main principles of Jainism. One who has achieved enlightenment is called a JINA (conqueror). In olden times he was called a Nigrantha (one without bonds). The rise of

Jainism was around 3BC in North India. It was a counter movement against the starkk heirarchical and ritualistic practices of that time. It gained a lot of support, and soon the important Emperors like Chandragupta Maurya (grandfather of Ashok). Guptas, Kushanas, King Kharvela were followers of the Jain teachings.

Thereafter it spread to other parts of India, finally reaching South India? Here it was a great success and enjoyed lavish royal patronage. Kings, army generals, noble men contributed generously. There were generous grants and endowments for the construction and maintenance of the Temples, and for pursuing and promoting Jain philosophical treatises and poetry. This later produced also the Bahuballi figure in Shravanebelgola. From South India, the Jain monchs emerged on their journey towards Sri Lank, known in those days as Ratnadwipa, or Simhala.

The ancient texts mention the arrival of jainism in sri lanka, long before the advent of buddhism. Jainism was well established all over the island. It was accepted by the kings and the tribes of sri lanka – the yaksha, the rakshasa the naga, the deva. The chronicles mention that the tribes who had accepted jainism were very civilized and were peaceful and of jain religion. Not savages, as some scholars depict.

The Mahavamsa mentions that Jainism continued in Sri Lanka under the reign of 21 kings - till 3 AD, till it was replaced by Buddhism. The ancient texts on Sri Lanka mention that king Panduka Abhaya welcomed the Jain Monchs to Anuradhapura, the then Capital of Sri Lanka. For the construction of the capital, he took the advice of the Jain Monchs. Thus he built 4 gateways, in the four heavens directions. The King also built houses for the Monks Jotiya Nigatha and other monchs. The monastery at Anuradhapura was the Giri Nigantha Arame. It is thus evident that years before Buddhism, Anurdhapura was Jain. Jain Statues were found in a cave in Terapura. There was a vihara in Trikutagir King Ravana has erected a jewelled statue on the request of Queen Mandodari.

In Sri Lanka also, before the advent of Buddhist religion, Jain religion was well entrenched. This has been substantially proved from old Buddhist literature. The Buddhist literature in Sri Lanka, 'Mahavansh and the ancient text 'Deepvansh' mention that Jainism existed during the reign of the early 21 kings in Lanka (10 B.C. to 3A.D), but was later destroyed by king Vattagami.

As recounted by Dr.Bhagchandra Jain: "The Mahavamsa, the best-known and most authoritative Ceylonese Chronicle in Pali verse, refers to the existence of Jainism in Ceylon even before the arrival of Buddhism. . . . The five hundred families of heretical beliefs and the construction of Viharas to the Niganthas on behalf of the king of Lanka, Pandukabhaya, indicate clearly that Jainism was a living religion in Ceylon during his reign. Pandukabhaya's period, deduced on the basis of the date of Buddha's death as 544 B.C., is supposed to be 438-368 B. C. Jainism had apparently been introduced to Ceylon before Pandukabhaya. It could have been even before the arrival of Vijaya. One may wonder whether a name like Arittha had any connection with the Jaina Tirthankara of that name.

The Mahavamsa holds evidence of Sri Lanka being a tribal state in her early history with the indigenous Yaksha, Raaksha, Naaga and Deva tribes worshipping the sun, the deities, demons and cobras. Jainism in the meantime, had arrived from India around the time of King Panduvasdev (nephew of Vijaya) in the third century BC.

Mahavamsa describes how King Pandukabhaya went with the construction of Anuradhapura as the capital city following Vedic tradition. On the advice of the Jain monk, Jothiyaniganta, Pandukabhaya had erected four entrances facing the main directions with temples at each entrance. The temple in the North and the North West were dedicated to Jothiyaniganta and on the East was the Temple of Kaalaveda. There was also a Chapel of the Queen on the West entrance along with a temple of a slave and a House of Great Sacrifice. Inside the city was the Temple of the Demon, Vaalamukhee.

It is therefore apparent that at the time of Pandukabhaya - 130 years before the arrival of Buddhism, there was no evidence of the presence of Buddhism in the newly-planned city of Anuradhapura. Instead there had been varied rituals and poojas of other faiths carried out under royal patronage.

Historians believe that some of these Jain-devotees who went to South India, ended up in Sri Lanka during the reign of Pandukabhaya (377-307BC.). Jainism however had existed even earlier, at the time of Panduvasdev.

Winds that blew from India always engulfed Sri Lanka and if Pandukabhaya as Mahavamsa documented had constructed the Giri Temple in Anuradhapura and also made three more temples for Jain monks - Jothiya, Kumbhanda and Giri.

The Mahavamsa (10.65-70; 33. 43-79) refers to the existence of Jainism in Ceylon even before the arrival of Buddhism. There were Jains in Sri Lanka in the Anuradhapura period. Paravitana says there was a Jain establishment dating from the time of Pandukabhaya and extending into the Buddhist period. There was a Jain establishment known as GiriNiganthaArama in the early Anuradhapura period. The three brothers who conspired to murder King Khallatana (109-103 BC) and usurp the throne, appear to have come from there. Soon after the Jains showed opposition to Vattagamaniabhaya. They were pleased when Vattagamaniabhaya was defeated in 103 BC. GiriNigantha had made a vicious remark when Vattagamaniabhaya was fleeing after his defeat with the Tamil invaders. When he regained power, Vattagamaniabhaya razed the Niganthaarama to the ground and replaced it with a Buddhist monastery which he gave to Mahatissathera who had helped him when he was hiding. This later became Abhayagiri monastery. These Jain monuments stood there for the reign of 21 kings, but afterwards they were converted into BuddhistSangharama. (Brahmins and Jains in ancient and medieval Sri Lanka by KamalikaPeiris)

According to Jaina records, the Yaksas and Raksasas who inhabited Ceylon prior to its Aryanization by Vijaya were not only human beings with a well developed civilization but also Jainas by faith. "The Vividhatirthakalpa mentions that at Trikutagiri in Kiskindha of Lanka there was magnificent Jain temple which was dedicated by Ravana, for the attainment of supernatural powers (KiskindhayamLankayahpatalankayamTrikutagrirausrisantinathah). To fulfil a desire of Mandodari, the principal queen, Ravana is said to have erected a Jaina statue out of jewels and this, it is said, was thrown into the sea when he was defeated by Ramachandra. Sankara, a king of Kalyananagara of Kannada, came to know about this statue and he recovered it from the bottom of sea with the help of Padmavati, prominent Goddess of Jainas." (Vividhatirthakalpa, pp. 93.)

Dr. Jain also has given a very important piece of evidence regarding the origin of famous image of Parshwanath at Shirpur (Maharashtra State, India) (known as AntarikshaParshwanath) which has been a matter of a century-old legal battle for the possession and management of the temple trust

between the Digambara and Shwetambara. As noted by him: “It is said that the statue of Parsvanatha which is worshipped even now at SripuraAntariksa (India) was brought by Mali and SumaliVidyadhara from Lanka. Vividhatirthakalpa, p.102 Another statue of Parsvanatha found in the caves of Terapura is also said to be from Lanka. Brahatkathakosa of Harisena, p. 200 The Karakanducariu describes how Amitavega, a Jaina king of Malaya, used to visit Lankadvipa as an intimate friend of Ravana who built a Jaina temple in Malaya. Karkanducariu, pp. 44-69. This Malaya can be identified with Malaya, the name of the central hill country of Ceylon.”

Thus Dr.Jain concludes. “These references seem to point out that Jainism existed in-Ceylon even before the birth of the Niganthanaputta. Vibhisana, the younger brother of Ravana, who was a follower of Jainism according to Jain tradition and literature, is referred to as the tutelary Yaksa of Ceylon (Vibhisanaastamraparaniyam) in the Mahamayuri, a magical text of Northern Buddhists which was translated into Chinese in the fourth century A. D. Vibhisana is still worshipped at Kelaniya and is supposed to be one of the four guardian deities of the Island.

“Although the supremacy which Buddhism achieved in Ceylon could have led to the suppression of Jainism and incidents similar to the destruction of Giri’s monastery by Vatta-Gamini Abhaya could have occurred at different times, Jainism did not disappear from Ceylon till at least after the eighth century. About the tenth century A. D. (Mahamayuri, ed. by Sylviam Levi, JA. 1915, pp.40; cf. The Society of the Ramayana, p. 68) Muni Yasahkirti was requested by the then king of Ceylon to improve the state of Jainism in the island. (JainaSilalekhaSangraha, p. 133)” (Dr.Bhagchandra JainJainism in Buddhist Literature).

Jainism crossed India from South India at about eighth century BC., if not earlier, and became one of the most important religions of Ceylon, which was known in those days by the name Lanka, Ratnadvipa or Simhala. The Mahavamsa refers to the existence of Jainism in Ceylon even before the arrival of Buddhism. According to it, Pandukabhaya built a house at Anuradhapur for the NiganthJotia and Giri and some Niganthas. Jaina tradition takes the history of Jainism in Ceylon even prior to its Aryanization, or the arrival of Aryas. Ravana, a king of Lanka long ago is said to have erected a Jaina temple there at Trikutgiri. Another statue of Parasvanatha, the 23rd Tirthankar found in the caves of Terapur is also said to be from Lanka. Jainism was a living religion of Ceylon up to the 10th century AD. (Spread of Jainism in India and abroad- Helmuth Von Glasnapp) Ancient Jain Literature in India mentions that Jain monks had gone out to Sri Lanka from India. King Kharavela of Utkal (Orissa) had sent an ardent Jain, had sent Jain missionaries to different places in India and beyond, just as King Asoka had sent out Buddhist monks.

The history of Sri Lanka shows that for some time Jainism did strike roots in Sri Lanka and that there was a regular exchange of Jain monks through Sri Lanka. For example some Jain monks had taken a Jaina image in a boat to Sri Lanka from India and from there they had gone to Siam (Thailand) (Sri Lanka Past & Present)

The Adam’s peak is a famous mountain in lower Sri Lanka. According the measurements made by leiut. Malcom (the first European to who ascended the peak) its area is 74x24 feet at top. It is the object of worship of the natives.1 Natives called it as Siripad, the sacred impression in stone. The Jain literature in India described it as foot prints of TirthankarAdinath or Rishabha. This is the first Tirthankar of time series. The Buddhist literature quotes this peak as “SumantKuta.” The Hindu literature

quotes this peak as Shreepad i.e. foot prints of Lord Vishnu. In short name of this peak is changed as per will and wish of the conqueror of the land. It is said that when Jain lost the power, Hindu king named this peak – Shreepad and when Buddhist came to power they renamed as SumantKut. When British came to power they renamed as Adam’s peak. Now the person of the land they may be Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian celebrates various festivals of their deities from fullmoon day of December to May every year with peaceful manner. It is the place of unity of human being. He bestows his head with diversity of religion in mind.

As regards the Jaina monuments in Ceylon, Dr. Jain further quotes the view of S. Parnavitana, an authoritative scholar on Ceylon Archaeology, as relevant:

“No remains of any Jaina monuments have ever been found in Ceylon. The earliest Stupas and Viharas of Jainism did not differ from those of Buddhism so much so, that without the evidence of inscriptions or of iconography it would be extremely difficult to differentiate between the two. Jain iconography had not yet developed in the times that we are dealing with. In the period during which this religion was prevalent in Ceylon, there were no monuments built of durable materials. Moreover, when Jainism disappeared, their places of worship must have been appropriated by the Buddhists as it happened with regard to the monastery of Giri, and any traces of the earlier faith would certainly have been obliterated in this way. Some of the earliest unidentified stupas of small dimensions may, however, be Jaina in origination.” Pre-Buddhist Religious Beliefs, JRAS. (Ceylon), Vol. xxxi, No. 82, 1929, p. 325,).

The decline of Jainism in Sri Lanka started with King Vattagamini. He was defeated by the Tamil in a battle. Had to flee from his capital. On his way out, it is reported that a Jain monk taunted and insulted him. He vowed to take revenge.

A few years later Vattagamini returned to power, and his throne. He fulfilled his threat, razed the Jain Temple to the ground and built a Buddhist vihara in its place. The Abhayagiri Vihara. However Jainism did not disappear from Sri Lanka after the coming of Buddhism. The texts mention that Kings beseeched Muni Yashakirti to help improving the status of Jains in Sri Lanka. It is possible that several statues worshipped in Jain Temples come from Sri Lanka. The famous Parshwanath statue in Shirpur (Maharashtra) is from Sri Lanka.

The old texts also mention that Vibhisana, younger brother of Ravana! was a Jain. He is referred to as a Titulary Yaksha of the island. He is worshipped at Kelaniye and is one of the four Guardian Deities of Sri Lanka. Dr. Jain comments on the absence of Jain Monuments, etc in Sri Lanka. But here he cites the famous Archaeologist S. Parnavitana. He gives a simple but logical explanation for this. The early Stupas of the Jaina and the Buddhists were very similar. With the absence of exact inscription and iconography, it would be difficult to differentiate the Jains and Buddhist Stupas. It may have even been that Jain Stupas have been taken over by the Buddhists.

I would suggest on Archaeological Exploration in Sri Lanka in a Scientific manner, so that a collective discovery of Jaina Sculptures and Jain Texts can be made.

Govt. of Sri Lanka can be the best coordinator for this work and many Archaeologists from India can be invited for this work along-with Sri Lankan Archaeologists because Jainism has all affected to India and Sri Lanka.

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