

Antiquity, Continuity and Development of Civilization and Culture in Bharat and Sri Lanka

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The discovery of the Indus Civilization seems to have thrown a new light on the antiquity of Jainism. The time assigned by the scholars to this culture is 3000 B. C. on the archaeological evidence and on the evidence of the relations with the cultures of the other countries. The religion of the Indus culture seems to be quite different from the religion of the Indus culture seems to be quite different from the religion of the Aryans in the Vedic period. In Mohenjodaro and Harappa, iconism is everywhere apparent. But it is extremely doubtful whether images were generally worshipped in the ancient Vedic times. In the Rig-Veda and the other Vedas, there is a worship of Agni, Sun, Varuna and various other deities. But they were worshipped in the abstract form as manifestations of a divine power. There are no doubt passages where the deities of the Rig-Veda are spoken of as possessed of bodily attributes R. G. VIII 175 speaks of the limbs and sides of Indra and prays Indra to taste honey with is tongue.

These images have been described by Marshal as the proto-type of Siva. But with due difference to the illustrious scholar, an argument can be hazarded that the word Siva meaning the auspicious occurs as an epithet of Rudra in the Rigveda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda. It is only Rudra and not Siva who is praised in all hymns. He is represented in these hymns as a malevolent deity causing death and disease among men and cattle. The physical description of Rudra is found in a number of hymns in great detail. For instance in some places, he is said to be tawny in color and other of a very fair complexion, with a beautiful hair on his head. He carries in his hands a bow and arrows and is described in some hymns as wielding the thunderbolt. This type of Rudra cannot be identified with the prototype Siva whose portraits are found on the seal because his attributes are quite different from the attributes stated in the Vedas about Rudra. Rudra occupies the minor position in the Vedic period but Siva seems to be dominant among the people of the Indus Civilizations. Siva with the puranic attributes cannot be identified with the images on the seals because these puranas were composed about three thousand years after Indus Civilization

Importance of History and Responsibility of Historians

The study of true history is possible only with the multifaceted vision, right perspective, then only the real proofs about the facts can be obtained. History is that medicine which can awaken the sleeping dynasties/societies/communities. All the sources of history should be discovered and forwarded to the readers without any religious biasedness and prior beliefs. Then only the usefulness and importance of the history can be projected.

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Buddhism of Sri Lanka

According to traditional Sri Lankan chronicles such as Dipavamsa, Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka in the third century BCE after the Third Buddhist council by Mahinda Bhikkhu, son of Emperor Ashoka, during the reign of Devanampiya Tissa of Anuradhapura. During this time, a sampling of the Bodhi Tree was brought to Sri Lanka and the first monasteries and Buddhist monuments were established. Among these, the Isurumuniya and the Vessagiri remain important centers of worship. He is also credited with the construction of Pathamaka cetiya, Jambukola vihâra and Hatthâlhaka vihâra and the refectory. The Pali Canon, having previously been preserved as an oral tradition, was first committed to writing in Sri Lanka around 30 BCE.

Mahavamsa 29[5] records that during the rule of the Greco-Bactrian King Menander I, a Yona head monk named Mahadharmaraksita led 30,000 Buddhist monks from “the Greek city of Alasandra” (v, around 150 kilometres (93 mi) north of modern Kabul, Afghanistan) to Sri Lanka for the dedication of the Ruwanwelisaya in Anuradhapura, indicating that Greco-Buddhism contributed to early Sri Lankan Buddhism. See also the Milinda Panha

History of Cultures & Civilizations

The discovery of truth is the purest form of research for the welfare of the humanity. Culture is the insight which is directly connected to the soul, and it develops the intellectual status. Culture is that mould in which the societies take shape. The social development based on culture & civilization depends on four parameters namely- religion, finance, duty/work, and longing for the eternal peace. Four policies based on these four parameters may be- religious, political, financial and education. Self-control adopted by the human beings can take the society to heights. Finally, the peace and happiness should be the true samples of the social development. Change is the law of nature. The culture and the civilization are greatly influenced by the religion and its philosophies followed by the concerned people. It is well known that religions have faced maximum changes from time to time depending on the preacher’s ideologies. The changes that occurred in the religious trends have been responsible for the clashes and disputes between the communities/societies/countries. It can be arguably said that more than 90% of the world population believes in the existence of God and his supremacy and His powers. It is this belief in the persons who believe that their God and their religion is the supreme and powerful and only His followers can get peace and happiness in their life. This is this belief which is the main cause of disputes, clashes, unrest etc. in the societies. At the same time, the question of antiquity of each religion is so much argued that even many historians especially from India did not remain unbiased.

Antiquity and continuities of religious trends

Now, we come to the point of continuity, antiquity can be discussed for two fields namely religion and historical i.e. the dynasties, their traditions, ancient cities etc. There may not remain disputes regarding the antiquities of religions and their historical facts since these disputes can easily be solved by studying the presence of archaeological sites and their geographical locations. However, in spite of available historical and geographical facts there have been disputes among many scholars because of their personal sentiments and their faiths.

Antiquity of Jainism

The antiquity of archaeological temple sites and their concerned history and geographical locations can be discussed only with the correct knowledge of related historical facts and traditions of any particular religion. Here I would like to discuss about the ancient origin of Jainism & Buddhism and especially about Lord Mahavira and Lord Buddha, who both were contemporaries. Lord Mahavira and Lord Buddha both belonged to Royal families who were strict followers of Jain religion. Lord Mahavira and Lord Buddha became ascetics and started following control on their sensual desires, especially on fasting. But the physical condition of Lord Buddha had deteriorated considerably (See Fig. 1 - Thi statue is situated in a Bagan Museum of Myanmar). This condition of Lord Buddha forced him to formulate his own philosophy, so called Buddhism, this theory there has been a big controversy among the historians. Many historians do not believe that Jain religion ever existed outside India, along with relaxing certain conditions regarding food habits e.g. eating of non-vegetarian food if the food is prepared by others to encourage the masses for its adoption. This relaxation helped the Bhikshus to travel to different countries without facing any problems related to hunger. In that trend, Buddhism became more popular amongst the masses. It is quite natural that many aspects of Lord Buddha's philosophies and preaching and some traditions were common both in Jainism & Buddhism e.g. principles of non-violence.

Now I would like to discuss the matter of statue worship, their expositions, mudras etc.

At the beginning, the Jain statues were mostly naked and in standing posture. The oldest Jain Tirthankara statues were unearthed in China (see figs. 2). Fig. 2a shows the location of 20 tunnels situated near Xian airport from where around 700 naked statues - figs 2b & 2c were unearthed. This nakedness is a demonstration of non-possessiveness by the Jain ascetics. Similar tradition was adopted by Greek Philosophers and saints. (See figs.3).

However, in due course of time, the naked standing posture in statues was abandoned and a sitting posture i.e. padmasan posture i.e. keeping right palm over the left palm (known as Abhaya Mudra) in statues was adopted by Shilpkars. The statues in padmasan posture and without any signs of clothes over it, was a strict condition according to Jain ideology.

As the time passed the followers of Jainism got divided into two sects, Digambers and Svetambers, digambers were the followers of naked statues and also the digamber saints also remain naked, whereas the swetambers believed in keeping their Tirthankara deities covered with clothes and adorned with golden ornaments depicting the statues of their deities in the royal dresses and their saints also bearing white clothes.

It had been quite usual in India and abroad to convert the temples and the statues existing there to convert in such a way to depict their deities belonging to them and prove that their religion is the oldest one. This has happened in the case of Buddhist temples, especially in the South-East Asia. In case of the construction of pyramids i.e. a towered structures/ stupas, I would like to mention that the high rising towers erected over the temples depicted the idea that the residential buildings should not be higher than the temples, otherwise that would be an act of disrespect to the deity. This trend had been followed in the old archaeological sites in the world.

The Jain religion represents the most ancient religion which was called by various names such as Aryas, Vratyas, Shraman, Nirgranthas etc. Although Jainism forms a relatively very small sect in India, but has its roots in the pre-historic past (Antiquity) while it is fully alive today. It has had and still has a very significant influence on the world culture not only in India but in the world at large and significantly in the far East. This religion formulated and stressed on the importance is three main principles namely non-attachment (non-possession of materials), multi-facetness of facts), truth & non-violence. The Jain religion represents the ancient religion which was called by various names such as violence. The Jain culture & its civilization are based on these three principles, which are its backbone.

Now the question of antiquity and its continuity in India can be discussed only by discussion on the existence and location of ancient Jambhoo-dveepa as mentioned in Indian religious books. To start with this discussion I take the help of Jain religious scriptures and to certain extent of vedic scriptures. Jambhoo-dveepa consisted of seven regions namely: Bharat, Hemvat, Hiranyavat, Ayerawat, Videha, Ramyak and Him. According to the ancient maps accumulated by different geographers and historians Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and south China was called as Mahabharat (Fig.3.) The Mahabharat region has been translated as Greater India, Exterior India and so on by foreign authors. This region was the bastion of Jain Tirthankaras and Jain ideologies,

In these maps, one would find cities like Ayuddhya, Vaishali, Hastinapur, Champa, Chandrapuri, etc. which are quite similar to the cities existing in India. It is not difficult for anyone to realize that the cities in S.E. Asia are much older than the cities in India. At the advent/ spread of Buddhism especially by Emperor Ashoka, the whole of SE Asia was converted into Buddhism and after that the Jain communities had to flee from there and came to India as Aryans and settled in India. On this theory, there have been big controversies among the historians. Many historians do not believe that Jain religion ever existed outside India but some evidence makes sure that Jainism existed outside of india.

1. Special reference is to be made regarding the ancient names of Thailand, it was called as Dwaravati, and also Adhai Dveepa (Jambhoo-dveepa+Dhatki Khand + Half Pushkavar dveepa i.e part of main land China) and also as Siam till 15th century AD thrice was existence of jain religion.
2. The temples of Angkorvat and Angkorthom are basically Five Meru temples and 52 towered temples as has been mentioned in Jain scriptures since centuries. But in the literature and history books, these temples have been reported to be Hindu temples prior to the advent of Buddhism. In spite of the fact that padmasan statues (basically the Tirthankara's statues (see fig.4) as found in these temples can not belong to Hindu temples. But still people are not willing to accept that these are the jain temples. These very statues are being represented as Lord Buddha's statues in dhyana mudra. If these statues were of Lord Buddha then why one after the other invasions from Myanmar on Thailand and further invasion from Thailand on Cambodia and from Cambodia to Laos & Vietnam, the statues were broken /destroyed.
3. In Laos many big padmasan Tirthankara statues in emerald have been adorned with gold and silver ornaments, other padmasan statues in stone have been covered with by golden foils, however, some statues in stones have been kept in their original naked form,

Right hands of many statues were changed to the upraised hand in abhaya mudra just to prove that these are Lord Buddha's statues.

All the above points have been put forward to the scholars for their perusal. If there is any truth in the arguments, then it is quite clear that the question of antiquity and continuity can easily be solved by judging/ observing the ancientness of the remains of the temples in the sub-continent.

My main aim in writing this article is not to blame/undermine or describe supremacy of one religion over the other but to describe how the antiquity aspects have been distorted. .