

**Buddhism and Maritime
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Kalinga - Sri Lanka Relations

Patronage to Buddhism by Kalinga King Nissanka Malla (1187-1196 AD) of the Polonnaruva Kingdom

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This paper expects to draw the readers' attention to one of the lesser known aspects of the Odishan history, i.e. the presence of a Kalinga Dynasty in Sri Lanka and its patronage to Buddhism during the Kingdom of Polonnaruva which existed in 11th and 12th Centuries AD. The author emphasizes mainly on the activities of King Nissanka Malla, who ruled Sri Lanka for 9 years from 1187 to 1196 AD and was the greatest among all Kalinga Kings in the country.

The history of Kalinga-Sri Lanka relations run much further than the time of King Nissanka Malla. According to Mahavamsa, the Great Chronicle of Sri Lanka, an Indian Prince called Vijaya and his seven hundred followers inhabited and settled down in Sri Lanka in the 6th Century BC. The original homeland of Prince Vijaya is known to be Sinhapura, of which the exact location has not been identified, but is believed to be in Bengal or East India by some scholars. Yet others prefer it to be in West India, somewhere in Gujarat. However, there was a strong belief in the mediaeval Sri Lanka that the location of Sinhapura was Kalinga. Though its authenticity is questionable, some of the people in Sri Lanka regarded Kalinga, ancient Odisha to be their original homeland.

Further, during the historical period, where there's more solid evidence, it is clear that the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka in the 3rd Century BC is a landmark in Kalinga - Sri Lanka relations. Though this fact will not be elaborated in this paper, one of the most

significant incidents evidencing this bilateral relationship cannot be overlooked. In 4th Century AD, the Sacred Tooth Relic of Lord Buddha was carried to Sri Lanka by a Kalinga Princess named Hemamala, daughter of King Guha Siva, accompanied by her husband Prince Danta. The relic was brought to Anuradhapura to ensure its safety as Kalinga was facing hostile invasion

The bringing of the Sacred Tooth Relic had made a great impact on the history and culture of the country. It has become the symbol of sovereignty of the island, hence protected by every ruler and sought by every aspirant of sovereignty throughout history. Today, it is considered to be the most venerated relic in the Buddhist world and is housed in the Temple of Tooth at Kandy, the last Kingdom of Sri Lanka.

The Kalinga Dynasty was formed in Sri Lanka through matrimonial relationships between Sinhalese and Kalinga royal families towards the latter part of the Anuradhapura, i.e. circa 10th Century AD. As mentioned in the Mahavamsa, King Mahinda IV (956-972) of Anuradhapura Kingdom chose a Princess from Kalinga to be his chief queen from among many Sinhalese Princesses. Mahavamsa mentions this as '*Tato Sinhalavamsa Pattepesi*' which means 'Thus well established the Sinhalese race'; probably meaning 'Thus destroyed the Sinhalese race', in real sense.

Two sons of this Kalinga queen ascended to the Kingship following their father's reign, namely King Sena V and King Mahinda V respectively. The latter happens to be the last King of the Anuradhapura Kingdom who faced defeat in the hands of the Cholas. He was imprisoned and banished to Tanjavur in 1017 where he died after 14 years of imprisonment. Anuradhapura was ransacked by the Cholas who shifted their capital to Polonnaruva from where they ruled the country for 70 long years till Vijayabahu I defeated and put an end to their rule in 1077. Vijayabahu I restored the Sinhalese Kingdom and continued to rule the island from the new capital, Polonnaruva. This kingdom lasted for about two centuries, throughout which the relations with Kalinga were a decisive factor in every aspect. Ultimately, the sovereign power of the Kingdom itself fell into the hands of the Kalinga dynasty. This dynasty continued to rule the country for three decades till the fall of Polonnaruva Kingdom.

The relations with Kalinga revived with King Vijayabahu I, who made

a Kalinga princess, named Thilokasundari, his chief queen. Her relatives migrated to the island from time to time and her own children were given in marriage to Sinhalese and Pandyan royalty. They too, came to power occasionally, continuing the Kalinga bloodline in the Kingship. This relationship continued and was strengthened over time as it was mutually beneficial for both Sinhalese and Kalingas as Buddhism was their common religion and the Cholas the common enemy.

King Nissanka Malla was the first among the Polonnaruva kings who was purely Kalinga blooded. He was born and raised in Kalinga and came down to Sri Lanka by the invitation of King Parakramabahu I, the then ruler. Nissanka Malla is known to be the nephew of the latter but the details of this relationship is not known. King Parakramabahu passed away without a successor. Hence, another nephew of his, Vijayabahu II, who was a viceroy by then, ascended the throne and he appointed Nissanka Malla as his viceroy. A year after his reign, King Vijayabahu II was assassinated by someone named Mahinda who took over the rule. However, his reign only lasted for five days till Nissanka Malla subjugated him to come into power.

The description of Nissanka Malla in Mahavamsa is only nine stanzas long, describing the time of his rule. Yet, most of the information on his rule can be gathered from the thirty nine lithic inscriptions belonging to his period. No other king of Sri Lanka, throughout history has issued such a large number of inscriptions, though most of them, more or less, contain texts eulogizing the King. One of the most famous inscriptions of King Nissanka Malla is the 'Gal Pota', which means the 'Stone Book', found at the sacred quadrangle of Polonnaruva. This is twenty six feet in length, 5 feet in breadth and 2 feet in height. Interestingly this block of granite had been transported from Mihintale, a place 100 km away from Polonnaruva by his soldiers, known as the '*Nissanka Bhata*'.

The Gal Pota and other inscriptions repeatedly give details of his family and dynastic affiliations to kings of Kalinga Chakravartin. Accordingly, his royal family belongs to the Okkaka, i.e. Ikshuwaka dynasty and the Surya Vamsa clan. Nissanka Malla's father is referred to as Sri Jayagopa Maha Raja and mother is mentioned to be one Parvati Devi, both of them still not identified among the Kalinga lineage. His Chief Queen was also a Kalinga queen named Subadra Devi and also

had another queen named Chandravati of Ganga Vamsa. Nissanka Malla held the epithet "*Kalinga Parakrama Veeraraja Nissanka Malla Apratimalla*" as mentioned in these inscriptions.

King Nissanka Malla has not attempted to hide his foreign origin and instead used it to legitimize his right to the Sri Lankan throne. He repeatedly mentioned that his origin being from Sinhapura, Kalinga, where Prince Vijaya, the legendary founder of Sinhalese race was said to have arrived from. He propagated the idea that legitimate rulers of Sri Lanka were Kalingas who belong to Surya Vamsa of Okkaka dynasty to which he too belonged. Moreover, he named the royal garden of Polonnaruwa as *Kalinga Uyana* and a forest as *Kalinga Vana*. He went even further and renamed Polonnaruwa, which was also known as *Pulastipura*, as '*Kalinga Raja Pura*'.

Nissanka Malla appears not only as a king who supported Buddhism but also was a devout Buddhist himself. He fostered the idea that the ruler of Sri Lanka should exclusively be Buddhist and declared that supporting non Buddhist Chola and Kerala princes was a great sin. He also stated that a righteous king as great as Buddha himself. Furthermore, he attempted to illustrate the king as the personification of God and behave as a 'God King' – "*Deva Raja*". Nissanka Malla commenced a long pilgrimage to Buddhist sites in Sri Lanka during the second year of his reign. He visited the sacred city of Anuradhapura and entrusted the task of repairing all ruined monuments to one of his ministers, to revive the city to its glory days. He also prohibited the killing of animals within a specific radius from Anuradhapura, fishing in twelve great tanks around the city and bird hunting. This last activity was a custom of the Kambojans, thus compensated them with gifts.

Apart from Anuradhapura, Nissaka Malla visited sites such as Mahiyanganaya, Devi Nuwara, Kelaniya, Medirigiriya, Velgamvehera, Dambulla and Samanatha Kuta, along with his Chathurangani Sena, four fold forces. He installed seventy eight gold gilded Buddha Statues at the Dambulla cave monastery and thus named it Rangiri Dambulu Vihara, which is, at present, a World Heritage Site. His ascent of the Samanatha Kuta; the Adams Peak, to worship the Sacred Foot Print of the Buddha, has been described in one of his inscriptions discovered in a cave at the hill range. Interestingly, his portrayal has been engraved along with this inscription, hence his appearance; a tall, slender person adorned with royal attire, has become evident to the world.

The construction of the Rankoth Vehera at Polonnaruva is a work of Nissanka Malla which is the largest stupa built after the Jetavana Stupa at Anuradhapura, the tallest in the world, which was built in the 3rd Century AD. No Stupa has been built in that magnitude after its construction. Nissanka Malla built a new temple for the sacred Tooth Relic at Polonnaruva known as the Hatadage, which means either sixty relic houses or a relic house built within sixty days. Both the tooth relic and the begging bowl relic of the Buddha were housed in this temple. Nissanka Malla donated his own son Veerabahu in the name of this temple and got him released from this bondage by paying a large sum of wealth to the temple. The picturesque Vatadage; a rotunda, and the Nissankalata Mandapa are also works of King Nissanka Malla. The Vatadage is a free standing Chetiyaagriha which is a unique type of Sri Lankan Architecture. It is noteworthy that he named this building as Ratnagiri Vatadage, as Ratnagiri is a known name in Kalinga. Moreover, Buddhist Statues placed around this monument are peculiar to Sri Lankan style but closely resemble those at Mankuvar in India.

Nissankalata Mandapa or flower trail hall of Nissanka was a royal pavilion made for placing the relic casket while king listens to Dharma. It is a unique building, due to its stylistic stone pillars which are found nowhere in the island. The king also constructed *Dana Shala* - Alms halls at Polonnaruva as well as all over the kingdom. Moreover, he practiced *Thulabhara Dana*, several times a year, with some members of the royal family at Polonnaruva. *Thulabhara* means offering gifts equal to his weight, measured by mounting on a scale pan.

Nissanka Malla announced that the protection of Buddhism is the prime responsibility of the kings of Sri Lanka and appealed to the future kings to follow him in this regard. In addition, he enforced regulations on Buddhist Sangha and disrobed those who committed any sinful acts inappropriate to the clergy without any enquiry. He paid compensation to them to live a layman's life. Thus, it is clear that Nissanka Malla has done a remarkable service to Buddhism and also to establish Kalinga authority in Sri Lanka, though it is clear that he used Buddhism and his Kalinga origin only as a vehicle for the success of his political journey. He is no doubt the greatest among all Kalinga kings of Sri Lanka who succeeded him at Polonnaruva. In greatness and fame, he falls behind only King Vijayabahu I and Parakramabahu I of Polonnaruva, both bearing the title 'great', and can be placed among

the three greatest kings of that kingdom where over twenty monarchs ruled for nearly two centuries.

Son of King Nissanka Malla, King Veerabahu succeeded him to the throne followed by the former's brother, Sahassa Malla and a few more princes of Kalinga origin. It was a time of struggle for supremacy among the Sinhalese, Pandyan and Kalinga princes. This period was called the 'Kalinga Era' and the rulers as Kings of Kalinga Dynasty by some historians though Kalingas were not always the in power. Ironically, the end of this kingdom was marked by a devastating attack by an invader named Magha, who was also of Kalinga Origin as he is popularly known as Kalinga Magha. However, this invasion was supported by a non Buddhist army of twenty four thousand Keralites in 1215AD.

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