

Jainism and Buddhism: Affinities that outweigh differences

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The Pali canon, in particular, the Sutta and the Vinaya pitakas of the Pali canon, have many references to Jainism. Of the six religious teachers mentioned in the Samannaphala-sutta of the Digha-nikaya (the collection of the long discourses of the Buddha) as contemporaneous to the Buddha, Nigantha Nataputta, the Jain religious leader, figures prominently. The references to Jainism may be divided into three broad categories: (i) monastic life and Vinaya rules, (2) Jain philosophy, and (3) Jain religious practices. The references are basically of negative nature and critical. Consequently, a casual reader is apt to feel that the two religious traditions are quite different from each other.

The rationale of the present paper is to suggest that this seeming incongruity is in fact not so, and that the affinities between the two traditions are many. Being two contemporary religions aiming at the very same communities of people of ‘the middle region’ (majjhima-desa) as their possible converts, it is no wonder that the two traditions highlighted their differences rather than their similarities. But today one is in a better position to view the traditions in a neutral manner and make a more accurate assessment.

The material to be produced in support of this thesis and the thesis itself are not new. Although one cannot rule out the possibility discovering new evidence, the purpose of making this presentation in this meeting is to highlight the need for renewed ties between the two religious and academic communities for the sake of creating a less dogmatic and more humane society for future generations.

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