Jaina Religion in Ancient Sri Lanka

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Jaina religion was one of the most popular religions that existed in ancient India. (It is well known as jainasam or jaina Sharma 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 Jaina religions nominees named Jothiyagiri and Kumbanda. The above statements prove that Jainainism was the first ever religion 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 Paundyas and Cholas in Sri Lanka.

There is no doubt that such religions 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.

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