

History of Jainism revealed in Pāli Literature

Bertram G. Liyanage

ABSTRACT

The word *nigaṇṭha* frequently occurs in both early Buddhist scriptures and later commentaries composed in Pāli. Since this word has been construed as the Pāli form of Sanskrit word *nirgrantha*, it directly refers to Jainism, one of the prominent religious movements prevailed at the time of the Buddha and alive even today. This comparison goes further identifying Mahāvīra, 24th *Tīrthaṅkara* in Jainism, with *Nigaṇṭhanāthaputta* in Pāli scriptures. Moreover Mahāvīra is said to be an elder contemporary to the Buddha, a fact that is supported by some literary evidence. This picture becomes a little complicated with some chronicle records about practicing Jainism in Sri Lanka before the formal advent of Buddhism in 3rd century BCE. This paper attempts to bring to the foreground many issues related to this historical picture of *nigaṇṭha* in Pāli Buddhist literature and argues that *Nigaṇṭhanāthaputta* in Pāli scriptures is not Mahāvīra, but he may be Pārśva. Then Jainism found in ancient Sri Lanka would be his Order. It further invites serious readers to reconsider the date of the Buddha as well. Most of the sustainable arguments are based on Pāli canonical scriptures, commentaries and rarely on some other literary record pertaining to the history of Buddhism and the history of Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Jainism, Pārśva, Mahāvīra, nigaṇṭha, Pāli literature