

Interpreting Jainism in Sri Lanka

Dr. S.K. Dwivedi*

The cultural relations of India and Sri Lanka has been very important through the ages. Not only religion, but all the spheres of culture are similar in both the countries. The amazing caves, temples and Dagobas of Sri Lanka are the witness of mutual exchange of cultural traits between these two countries. They prove Sri Lanka to be the safest heaven and a stable just as a magnificent mansion for Jainism and Buddhism, both. During chola period, the cross section of society from South India, particularly Tamilnadu travelled and even migrated to simhala Dvipa and brought both the countries under laurels.

Jainism existed in Sri Lanka (Simhala Dvipa) before Christian era. It is evident in the Mahavamsa, that the king Pandukamaya built a temple and a monastery for two Jain monks at his capital Anuradhapur in about 4th century B.C. It is also said that these edifices were intact constantly upto the reign of 21 Kings, which were later converted into Buddhist Sangharam. Scholars are of opinion that the temple and monastrey existed during the reign of king Vattagamini (90 B.C.-38 B.C.) It is mentioned in Mahavamsa that the Jain Shravakas were residing at Anuradhapur in about 420 B.C. when it was established as a royal city. Some of the Jain monks visited simhala Dvipa to propagate Jainism time and again. Jain monk Yashkirti was one of them.

According to Jain literature, King Bharat, the son of Tirthankar Rishabhanath, occupied simhala Dvipa and developed the Jain ideology overthere.

Buddhist text Mahavasa mentions that Mauryan king Smprati was very much interested in propagating Jainsim in simhala Dvipa and also sent a delegatnion of some Jain monks over seas. The Jain Tirthankar Rishabhanath Sumatinath and Bharat chakravartti had been associated with Sri Lanka.

The places like Sigiria, Abhayagiri, Srigiri Anuradhpur etc. were the cradle of Jainisim in Sri Lanka.

* Professor, School of Studies in AIHC & Archaeology, Jiwaji University, Gwalior, M.P. (India)