

Anthropological Study on Kalinga Sri Lanka Relationship

Asutosh Mishra*

Department of Anthropology, IGNOU University, Cuttack, India

ABSTRACT

The island country, Sri Lanka, famously known as the pearl of the Indian Ocean and the soul of India that is Odisha otherwise known as the temple city of India had a very ancient connection. History has been saying that the founder of the Sinhalese race was an Odia (Kalinga) as mentioned in Mahavamsa, the greatest literature of Sri Lanka. Recent genetic studies have confirmed that the ancestors of Sri Lankans were from Odisha. Kalinga, the ancient Odisha, had a strong relationship with Ceylon (Sri Lanka) that flourished for 1700 years. Matrimonial tie was the main reason for this relationship to sustain so long. It was Kalinga that had popularised Buddhism in the island. It had even introduced Vajrayana Buddhism to the people of the island. The famous Abhayagiri monastery of Sri Lanka has a deep connection with Kalinga. Both of them used to share an identical culture that most of the scholars hasn't pointed out. Kalinga had influenced Sri Lanka in many ways and it can be seen through the similarities they both still carry.

KEYWORDS: Odisha Sri Lanka relation; History of Kalinga ceylon ties; Anthropological view on Kalinga Sri Lanka affairs

INTRODUCTION

Both Odisha and Sri Lanka had a famed ancient history. Kalinga (Odisha) had one of the strongest kinships with Ceylon (Sri Lanka). It was not only the maritime relationship but also the bloodline that both of them had shared. From 500 B.C.E. to 1200 C.E., this relationship was sustained. Both had seen political turmoil, chaos, anarchy in their respective lands. Yet, the brotherhood had never torn apart. Kalinga even supported Ceylon against its countrymen. It was the central part of Sri Lanka's history. It was Kalinga that had created the Sinhalese race, shaped their culture, and been its greatest ally. This paper is an attempt to eulogize that relationship and draw attention to the homogeneity in history. There is much more to this relationship than what meets the eye [1].

Mahavamsa and Dipavamsa, the greatest chronicles of Sri Lanka, give the record of the introductory history of the land. These Pali chronicles talk about the first-ever king of the country, Vijay. According to Mahavamsa, Indian prince Vijay with his 700 followers inhabited Sri Lanka in the sixth century B.C.E. and founded the Sinhalese race. The original homeland of Vijay is known to be Simhapura. It further states that the Simhapura was set up by king Simhabahu and the Sinhala race was derived from his name by his son, Vijay. The same place has its reference in Manimekhalai, a Tamil literary work, which is considered as one among the top 5 greatest Tamil epics. It has described Simhapura as the capital of Kalinga. The mention of Simhapura is also found

in Kalinga history. It was ruled by the great Matharas from the 5th to 6th century C.E. Epigraphical sources show that Simhapura was the capital of Kalinga during their rule [2].

Mahavamsa further states that before the arrival of Vijay there were 4 indigenous clans of Ceylon: yaksha, naga, deva, raksha. Vijay became the king only after defeating the native tribe yaksha who was believed to be the inhabitants of the mountain. In India, we do have the same categories. Yakshas are commonly known as Gandharvas. Almost in every temple, one will find sculptures of yaksha, yakshini. In Odisha, they are one of the major features of decorative motifs which are belonged to one of the two categories of temple sculptures of Odisha. All famous temples of Odisha are flanked by yaksha sculptures and motifs [3]. In the case of tribes, it is inevitable to find indigenous Gods and Goddesses. Tribes of Odisha also have such tutelary gods of forests, mountains, and villages. Gadaba, the oldest tribe of the state, considers 'Bana Debata' (forest god) as their supreme deity. This forest deity is nothing but a yaksha. Kondh, the largest tribe of Odisha, doesn't follow Hinduism. They are nature worshippers. They believe that forests, mountains, rivers all have presiding deities and their prime God is 'Dharani Deota', who is a spirit god [4].

Since early times, the naga cult has been existing in Odisha. Two life-size anthropomorphic images of naga, though in broken condition, are kept in Odisha state museum which might have preceded Kharavela time. More such anthropomorphic images were found in the vicinity of Bhubaneswar indicating the presence

*Correspondence to: Asutosh Mishra, Department of Anthropology, IGNOU University, Cuttack, India; E-mail: singhr@gmail.com

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of a large naga cult. Odisha even had 'Nagabansi rulers' whose Ista devata (family god) were the nagas. The proof of the dynastic worship of naga is found from the asanpat inscription of the naga king Satrubhanja, in the keonjhar region who roughly belonged to the 4th century C.E. [5].

The kanasa copper plate grant of the king Lokabighraha dated 600 C.E. refers to the worship of Maninaga. Apart from Satrubhanja, there existed another naga dynasty from Mayurbhanj. This dynasty is known as the Vairata Bhujanga dynasty that used to worship the naga as their tutelary deity. They had carved Kinchaka naga on the patamundi hill which shows how strongly they were associated with naga cult [6].

Aside from east and north Odisha, western Odisha was also involved in the naga cult. A beautiful naga icon is found from maraguda valley in the Kalahandi district. The naga kings of the district claim their origin from the mythical naga Pandarika. There is even evidence which reveals that the mighty Somavansis were also intimately bound to the naga cult [7].

The continuity of this cult hasn't broken till now. In Bargarh, western Odisha, "The Nagabacha Ceremony" is performed every year in the month of September-October. The purpose of it is to initiate a 'nagbacha' (serpent kid) that is similar to the concept of baptism in Christianity [8].

The Deva-Rakhyasa theme had induced many Gods, Goddesses in Hinduism. It is written in Vedas and Puranas that in ancient times there were two clans Sura-Asura that later became Devata-rakhyasa. Devata has been portrayed as the good clan and rakhyasa as the evil one. Every Hindu temple in India is all about the depiction of the victory of good over evil in various forms [9]. In Odisha, we even have places named upon rakhyasa. Asurgarh is one such place that literally means 'fort of the demon'. Though there are several such forts been found in different parts of Odisha, recently in 2019 archaeologists' excavated artifacts belonging to pre-Mauryan era from Asurgarh in the Kalahandi district. Those artifacts dated back to the 4th century B.C.E. and the land indicates that the inhabitants of it belonged to a sophisticated society. Hence, it won't be wrong to say, people of that place were much older than that and they were either from the asura clan or worshippers of demons (asura). It is a fact that animism came first and religion later. This stands true even for Kalinga. It had the same 4 clans that Mahavamsa talks about in Ceylon before the arrival of Vijay [10].

Odisha has not only created the Sinhalese race but also has built a legacy. Even after the demise of Vijay and his successors, the cultural ties between Odisha and Sri Lanka carried on. Frequent visits to each other's land were one of the reasons other than having a common religion. But what stand out for them was cross country marriages. The matrimonial relationship between Sinhalese and Kalinga royal families has a long history [11]. In the 10th century C.E., king Mahinda IV, though of Sinhalese origin, had chosen a Kalingan princess as his chief wife. King Vijaybahu I, founder of Polonnaruwa kingdom, also had a Kalingan princess named Trilokasundari as his chief wife. After the death of Parakramabahu Sri Lanka couldn't keep up with the political turmoil. At that time Nissanka Malla who was a pure Kalingan bloodline took over the throne and brought peace to the nation. His chief wife was also a Kalingan named Subadra Devi. He was one of the greatest kings of Sri Lanka and was a great Buddhist patron. It was he who repaired the ancient city of Anuradhapura. He had installed 78 gold-gilded Buddha statues at the Dambulla cave monastery and gave it the

name Rangiri Dambulla Vihara (Manatunga, 2009). This place is now a world heritage site [12].

Unlike in other cases the origin and works of Nissanka Malla have their mention in the inscription at Gal pota, the stone book, besides in Mahavamsa. His bloodline ruled Sri Lanka for some time and few scholars refer to that phase as Kalinga Era [13].

As we move from the history of Sinhalese to their religion, it was and it is Buddhism which has been dominant since the advent of Mahendra, son of Ashoka, to the island. Buddhism spread throughout Northern India only because of the personal endorsement of king Ashoka. He also actively proselytized outside his kingdom to foreign lands by sending missions, often monks as envoys. According to Dipavamsa, the 2nd greatest literature of Sinhalese, Ashoka sent his son Mahendra to Sri Lanka for spreading Buddhism during the reign of Devanampiya Tissa. Later the bond grew stronger when Ashoka sent his daughter Sanghamitra with saplings of a Bodhi tree to the island. 'Samantapasadika' reveals that she was escorted by 8 families of Kalinga in her journey. There she established "the order of the nuns" with the support of Anula, the chief queen of Tissa. It seems natural that few Kalingan women of those 8 families must be Buddhists who were members of that order and might have led it for its smooth run [14].

There is another tale that speaks eloquently of the friendship between the two nations of that era. Dathavamsa, a Buddhist work from 3rd century C.E., discloses that king Guhasiva of Kalinga and king Mahadisena of Sri Lanka had strong friendly relations with each other. Citing one example it says when Guhasiva felt there was a threat to his throne due to invasions, he secretly sent his daughter Hemamala with his son-in-law Dantakumara to Ceylon with his most precious item. It was the sacred tooth relic of Buddha which he and his people used to worship in his capital Dantapura. Mahadisena took the responsibility of protecting and preserving it. He made a shrine for it thereby introducing a whole new chapter to their culture. This incident was the watershed moment in Sri Lankan history. The next few centuries were followed by the construction of Buddhist viharas, stupas, and chaityas. 4th and 5th century C.E. saw not only architectural marvels but also the creation of great literature. It was during this period many valuable works on Buddhist religion and philosophy were produced in the country. The greatest chronicles, Mahavamsa and Dipavamsa, of Sinhalese literature were also composed in this period; 350 C.E. and 475 C.E. respectively. Therefore, it was Kalinga that had popularised Buddhism in Sri Lanka by giving away its most precious asset, Buddha's tooth relic [15].

In the 7th century C.E., Kalinga had gone through a paradigm shift. This period had witnessed the rise of Vajrayana Buddhism which is also known as Tantric Buddhism. With time, it replaced Mahayana Buddhism and by the 8th century C.E. became the dominant religion of the country. This was a landmark event for entire Southeast Asia as it caused a ripple across the Indian subcontinent and China. Suddenly all those nations who followed Buddhism started to shift from Mahayana to Vajrayana. In the 8th century, Sri Lanka also saw this trend. The main God of this sect of Buddhists is 'Tara'.

But there is confusion around the name since Hindus also worship him alongside another Goddess Tarini. There is a reason behind it that might offer an answer. According to some historians, Tara was a Buddhist god whereas Tarini was a Hindu deity (Behera, 2019). As the two religions coexisted for a long time, the assimilation made

the goddess Tarini to be worshipped as “Tara Tarini” by Hindus.

Her name has also been mentioned in Mahayana Buddhism. Buddha was against Idol Worship. So, Buddhism in its infancy stage refrained from idolatry. But change is the first law that nature obeys and so does any religion. By the 1st century C.E., Buddhism got a taste of it and accepted idol worship as a new addition to their cult.

This is been confirmed from Buddhist Tantric texts that worship Tara Tarini as a tantric deity “Buddha Tara”. Whether it was Hindus or Buddhists that worshipped Tara first is a subject of debate but one thing is certain that Kalinga was the originator and epicenter of Vajrayana Buddhism or Tantric Buddhism. Every God, Goddess related to Vajrayana has its figure and images at the Diamond Triangle of Odisha; Ratnagiri, Udayagiri, and Lalitagiri.

As stated earlier, Vajrayana Buddhism spread in Sri Lanka in the 8th century C.E. Inscriptions at Abhayagiri Vihara testifies that. It was the major monastery site of Mahayana, Theravada, and Vajrayana Buddhism that was situated in Anuradhapura, the ancient capital of Ceylon (Sri Lanka). A fascinating thing is written on that inscription which states “Buddha transforms into a female goddess Dharanis”. According to Vajrayana, Tara was considered a female Buddha who was originated from the tears of Boddhisattwa Avolokiteswara. It implies Dharani and Tara aren’t different but one entity. Ashoka Edict highlighted that the Tara Tarini temple was a famous Buddhist site. Putting two and two together we conclude that Kalinga was the first one to worship Tara as the female form of Buddha. From here it had spread to Tibet, China, and Southeast Asia which includes Sri Lanka. Hence, a change in the religious belief in Sri Lanka was also brought by Kalinga.

Mishra (2015) in his article ‘Abhayagiri in Anuradhapura, Buddhist Diamond Triangle of Odisha and Java: Art and Epigraphic evidence of Triadic Linkage of Esoteric Buddhism in Maritime Asia’ argues that the high resemblance between dharanis found from Odisha and Abhayagiri, indicates towards the transmission of it from Odisha to Sri Lanka. There are two points that strengthen his argument. The first one is the three famous Indian Buddhist monks (Amoghavajra, Vajrabodhi, and Subhakarasiṃha) who had spread esoteric Buddhism in Southeast Asia, Tibet, and China, studied at Ratnagiri, Odisha. Sarvatathagatatattwasamgraha (STTS) and Mahavairocana sutra are the two Buddhist tantric texts which form the basis of the mandala stupa. These three monks took the two texts with them and went to Abhayagiri first. From there to Java and finally to China. Excavations at Abhayagiri led to the findings of the mandala and a few lines from these texts validate the theory of transmission of dharanis from Odisha to Sri Lanka, particularly from Ratnagiri. The second point is the earliest reference of the Mahavairocana sutra, which is the first true Buddhist tantra, which was found from the back slab of the Vairocana image from Lalitagiri, Odisha. Numerous dharanis in clay seals are found from Ratnagiri. These are very much alike to that of Abhayagiri.

There are several stupas in Odisha that were and are filled with dharanis inside it. Some dharanis have been found in terracotta and stone plaques inside a stupa indicating they must be inserted during the consecration of stupas. Odisha state museum has an inscription on “Bodhigarbhalankaralaksa Dharani” which specifically advocates in favour of putting dharanis inside a stupa during the consecration.

In Abhayagiri, Sri Lanka one finds similar dharanis being inserted inside a stupa. This shows the concept of placing Dharanis inside

a stupa in Abhayagiri Vihara was taken from Kalinga by Sinhalese. There are even similarities between Buddha images from Cuttack hills (Diamond Triangle) with Abhayagiri. In all likelihood, the artists of Kalinga or its monks taught Sinhalese about all these that we see and find in Abhayagiri.

The art and craft speak volumes about the heritage of a country. In the case of Odisha and Sri Lanka, there is much uniformity between them. Their cultural vibes are akin to each other.

The history of the pottery of Odisha is at least 4000 years old as evident from a recent excavation conducted at the Durgadevi village of Balasore. A variety of potteries and terracotta have been found at numerous sites in Odisha different periods. This shows the long continuity of pottery and terracotta in the state.

Terracotta work of Odisha is considered national heritage and in the current decade even has got international fame. When we look at Sri Lanka in this context, we find a direct link to Odisha as per their historical records. Mahavamsa has thrown some light on it. According to it, when Vijay landed on the shores of the island, his entourage had included potters. There is another instance that tells us that potters of Kalinga went to Sri Lanka and might have influenced their culture. As recorded in Mahavamsa, Sanghamitra, daughter of Ashoka, arrived in the country in 288 B.C.E. She was accompanied by artisans from 18 trades and one of them was potters.

Puppetry, lacquer work, drum making, wood carving, jewellery making, and handlooms are the rest categories that are popular and similar in both cultures. The famous Kandyan dance of Sri Lanka and Kandhei Nacha of Odisha both reflect upon the same narrative. Both depict the story of Ramayan, the great Hindu Mahakabya, in their performances.

Though it is evident from linguistic evidence that the Sinhalese language belongs to the family of Indo-Aryan language, yet, there is a controversy regarding its origin. Some scholars believe it was based on a western dialect of India while others argue for its eastern dialect. Famous Sri Lankan historian Siddhartha (1935) in his article titled “the Indian Languages and their Relation with the Sinhalese Language” advocates for the eastern origin of the Sinhalese language.

He further argues that if one would study the Odia language and compare it with the Sinhalese, will find that the later language is nothing but a modified form of the Odia. Shahidulla (1962), the renowned Bengali linguist, philologist, educationalist, and writer, has shown philological facts to prove that the ancestors of the Sinhalese people had migrated from Eastern India [14].

Apart from linguistic and philological evidences, early Sinhala inscriptions also points out to its Eastern origin. In his introduction to ‘The Phonology of the Sinhalese Inscriptions up to the End of Tenth Century A.D.’, P.B.F. Wijeratne (1945, p.8) states that “the early language must have originally belonged to Eastern tract of India”. Another Sri Lankan scholar D. J. Wijeratne (1956) has taken the same stance on this subject. In his article ‘History of Sinhalese noun’ he suggests that there is clinching evidence which indicates that the earliest Sinhalese as recorded in the inscriptions of the 3rd century B.C. was a middle Indian Dialect and have strong affinities with the Eastern group of middle India.

Whether it was about putting the first step on the island or creating the Sinhalese race, Kalinga is the name that Sri Lankan history has recorded as the founder. It has even popularised Buddhism

in the country which is the dominant religion of the island. It is in the bucket list of every Buddhists around the world to visit the temple of sacred tooth relic at Kandy, Sri Lanka. The relic inside this world heritage site was a gift from Kalinga. There is another gift to the island by a king of pure Kalingan bloodline, Nissanka Malla. Rangiri Vihara, a world heritage site, was constructed by Malla. Genetic studies also confirm that Sri Lankans have their ancestors from Odisha. Whether it was the maritime trade or matrilineal relationship, Kalinga was the first choice of Sri Lanka. Both of them have stood for each other in the time of need, in the time of chaos [16].

CONCLUSION

Kalinga has an inalienable part in the history and culture of Sri Lanka. On the surface, ethnological study of the Sinhalese race tells that there is more South Indian flavour in Sri Lankan culture. But from the anthropological perspective, Odisha and Sri Lanka are two brothers from different mothers. They share almost the same cultural identity. The rituals, the beliefs that are rooted in the villages of Lanka are identical to the villages of Odisha. I hope in the near future, Odisha and Sri Lanka will reset their relationship which had a glorious past. In ancient times, the two cultures had inspired Southeast Asia for many centuries. They can do so even today. If it happens, it will strengthen India Sri Lanka relation also which has weakened a little bit.

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