



Fertility Cult

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Summary : Buddhism became the state religion of Lanka after the arrival of Arhat Mahinda in the 3rd century BC. From the 6th century BC to the establishment of Buddhism there were various religion prevalent in Lankan society. Out of those religions, Hinduism was the most prominent and the others were Jainism, Ajeewaka and parbbajaka

Although the other religions declined before the newly established Buddhism, they were not totally eradicated from the society. Some of the pre-Buddhist concepts were even absorbed in to Buddhism.

The evidence from the reign of King Pandukabhaya, show that Hinduism, led by the worship of demons, was the state religion at the time. However, the other religions too were treated equally by the king. Shrines as well as residences for the Brahmins, Ajeewakas and Nighantas were constructed. Although there is no evidence in the written sources for the existence of Buddhism in the pre-Buddhist Lanka, it is not possible to conclude that there was no knowledge of Buddhism at all among the Lankans.

The primitive beliefs and rituals, sacrifices and blood sacrifices occupied a special position in the pre-Buddhist Lanka. The centres of these beliefs and rituals were royal gardens and public gardens. The Neket Keiya was celebrated with great pomp and pageantry based in these gardens.

Keywords: Valavāmukhī, fertility cult, Pārvatī, Yakśa and Yakśani

Introduction: There are considerable details in the chronicles, including the Mahavamsa, about the non-Buddhist beliefs in the pre-Buddhist Lanka. However no evidence could be found in the chronicles to support the existence of Buddhism, despite which it is the view of certain scholars that some knowledge of Buddhism would have existed at the time.

The chronicles seldom mention the other religions after the arrival of Buddhism in Lanka. The intention of the chroniclers would have been to highlight the decline of other religions

with the establishment of Buddhism as the state religion. However, it is clear from some descriptions in the chronicles that the pre-Buddhist religions survived in Lanka and declined only gradually in the face of Buddhism.

The leading religion of the pre-Buddhist Lanka was Saivite Hinduism. The basis of that religion was the worship of demons who were divine spirits. The demons Chittaraja, Kalavela, Maheja and Kuvera and the she-demon Valawa Mukhi were prominent among those divine spirits. It is possible to identify the demon Chittaraja as God Siva and the she-demon Valawamukhi as the consort of Siva, Parvati. There is no obstacle to identify some of the other demons as local deities worshiped by the populace. In addition to these, the worship of natural forces, such as the mountains, the sun and the moon, was prevalent among the people.

The worship of fertility was very popular among the pre-Buddhist religions. The main ritual intended to worship fertility was the Neket Keliya. Most of the time the Neket Keliya was held centred upon the royal gardens. The common people celebrated it in the public gardens allocated to them.

Although this study was primarily based on written sources, the existing archaeological sources too were used whenever possible, out of which the frontpiece sculptures from the 1st to 2nd centuries AD took the main place. These contain some evidence about the religions of the pre-Buddhist Lanka. The frontpiece sculptures are a feature bearing decorative carvings, to be seen in some of the ancient dagobas in Sri Lanka.

Fertility Cult: The Mahāvamsa is the primary source to study the cults and the beliefs of Pre-Buddhist Sri Lanka. Thus, the written sources, including the Mahāvamsa, were used for this research. These cults and beliefs, included in chronicles, are also elaborated based on physical remains. Therefore, to gather evidence from the archaeological remains, special attention was paid.

The aim of this article is to discuss concepts regarding the fertility cult that existed in Sri Lanka from the ancient times to the introduction of Buddhism during the 3rd century BCE. The existence of different religious beliefs is attested by the archaeological excavations

carried out in different parts of the island, historical chronicles of Sri Lanka (*Vamsakatha*), epigraphical and art historical evidence.

An identical cult worship existed in India during the said period: The main objects of worship Yakshas and yaksinis in both countries were that main features of this cult were yakshas and Yakshanis mainly connected to the fertility cult. Main features of this cult were sacrifices of various types, of erotic activities, water festivals and so on. The chronicles have given a prominent place to the fertility cult than the other beliefs that existed during the period Viz. Jainism, Ajiwakas, Paribrajakas and Brahmanism, and other beliefs. this shows that the fertility cult and worship of Yakshas and Yakshanis had received royal patronage.

The authors of Sri Lankan Chronicles Mahavamsa, vamsatthappakasini etc. were written by Buddhist monks. The chronicles had ignored the fertility cult and connected ceremonies since the introduction of Buddhism. This may be due to the fact that the aim of the chroniclers might have been the recording of the history of Mahavihara and thereby giving prominence to Buddhism. That does not mean the complete eradication of the fertility cult. cult worship has been past and parcel of the popular belief and as such complete eradication of it might have been impossible. But, as royal patronage was given to Buddhism, I presume that there was a certain set back of the other religious beliefs. But it seems certain cult practices had been absorbed into Buddhism with certain modifications, For instance, the most sacred relic of the Buddha Tooth Relic and Sri Maha Bodhi (the sacred pipal Tree under which the Buddha attained Enlightenment) were annually bathed in order to invoke the blessings to receive rain and prosperity.

Dr. C. E. Godakumbura hold the view that the water ceremonies had their origin in the pre-buddhist water ceremonies (Godakumbura, 1970: 92- 92).

As I have mentioned earlier, fertility cult was interwoven with the worship of Yakshas and Yakshanis. Yakshas and Yakshanis are mentioned in the chronicles from the time of the first visit of the buddha to Sri Lanka. But they were elevated to the position of divine beings only during the reign of Pandukabhaya (circa 4th Century B.C.) The Yakshas and Yakshanis mentioned in the chronicles prior to the reign of king Pandukabhaya were ordinary human beings who worshipped Yakshas and Yakshinis. But the Yakshas and

Yakshanis mentioned in the chronicles during the time of Pandukabhaya were divine Personalities (Mahavamsa, ch. 10, Dissanayaka 2010, 153 - 156).

These terms today denote monstrous beings who terrify humans. But earlier they denoted the beings who possessed spiritual powers. According to the Mahavamsa the reign of Pandukabhaya shows the appearance of fertility Cult and adoration of the Yakshas and Yakshinis. Such a Yakshani named Valavamukhi (Wadabamukhi = mare headed Yakshini) became the most popular and sacred yakshani (Mahavamsa, ch.10).

It is stated in the Mahavamsa that this Yakshini was responsible for Pandukabhaya's victory against his enemies. After his enthronement king Pandukabhaya made necessary arrangements for her to reside in the palace garden (- do -, ch. 10, vv. 85 - 86). We can suggest from this that a shrine dedicated to this particular yakshani must have been erected as a mark of gratitude. What was the reason for him to erect a shrine in the royal garden itself? The answer to this question is found in the subsequent stanza of the Mahavamsa. There it is stated, that king Pandukabhaya having seated with Yakkha named Chittaraja on the same platform witnessed the dances of human and divine beings while indulging in Sexual pleasure. This ceremony was held on an auspicious time which coincide with fertility cult. Very often royal garden had been selected for these ceremonies (Nakshatra Kreedā). The most important feature of this ceremonies was erotic rituals connected with universal fertility.

Erection of a shrine for this Yakshini in the royal garden where all the ceremonies and rituals connected with the fertility cult were held proves beyond reasonable doubt that Valavamukhi was an important goddess connected with the fertility cult.

This goddess or Yakshini is more or less the same goddess viz. Parvathi of India who is considered the mother goddess who is connected with the fertility cult. This concept may be found all over the world. According to Fraizer, different names have been used to denoted the mother goddess in Western Asiatic countries. He is of opinion that this can be proved by an analysis of Mythology in various countries. Indian Mother Goddess Parvati and the Sri Lankan mother goddess have several similarities. In fact, we can conjecture that Sri Lankan Walavamukhi and Indian Parwathi are more or less identical. Parvati in her aspect of Durga is identical with Sri Lankan's mother goddess Valavamukhi. Parvati

is also known as Uma Hemavati and Ambiga and all these names suggest that she is associated with mountains. According to Mahavamsa Valavamukhi the Mother goddess of Sri Lanka is connected with the mountain of Dhūmarakha or (modern) Dimbulagala (- do -, ch.10, vv. 53 - 54). Another identical feature of both is the leadership attributed to them in war. Kottravai, the south Indian Yakshini or goddess connected with fertility cult was ferocious and cruel in exterminating enemies, and She dances on the dead bodies of the fallen enemies. These ferocious qualities later were absorbed in Durga-another aspect of parvati.

The prominent place that Valavamukhi played in the wars of Pandukabhaya against his enemies shows beyond reasonable doubts her war like character of Indian goddesses of fertility cult.

Mahavamsa clearly mentioned the existence of Brahmanism during the reign of Pandukabhaya (- do -, ch.10, vv. 102). It also says the establishment of Sivika Sala (- do -, ch. 10, v. 102). In the Vamsattappakasini (commentary to the Mahavamsa) gives two interpretations to the word (Vamsattappakasini : 296). One is the hall where siva Linga (Phallic) was placed. The other is a lying-in-home (maternity hall). If we accept the interpretation of the commentary, we can come to the conclusion that Saivism was in existence during this period.

According to the interpretation of the commentary we can come to the conclusion that Saivism was in existence during this period. If it is so, Parvathi the consort of Siva was known to the people during that period. The earliest sculpture found in the frontispiece of the Kantaka Chetiya which was built in the 1st century A.D. depicts a low relief sculptured figure of Ganesha who was the son of Siva. According to Alice Getty this is the oldest sculptured figure of Ganesha found in the world (Premathilaka 1980: 325). This frontispiece sculpture of the Kantaka Chetiya shows the pre-Buddhist religious beliefs. This as glaring example of the existence of Saivism before the advent of Buddhism, Further, in the early Brahmi cave inscriptions of Sri Lanka (3rd century B.C. to 1st century A.D.) are found names of personalities like Maha Siva, Sivaguta etc. which proves the existence of Saivism in Pre-Buddhist Sri Lanka (Paranavitana 1970,).

There are no other personalities that could be compared with Parvati in our chronicle other than Valawamukhi. The other Yaksha connected with the fertility cult of Sri Lanka is Chiththaraja (Mahāvamsa, ch. 10, v. 87). According to some scholars Chiththaraja is synonymous with Siva. According to the Mahāvamsa, Chittarāja was also a demon or a demon soul. The Mahāvamsa mentions that Chittarāja lived in the lower half of the Abhaya Wāwa. This means there is no doubt that a Devāla or a temple was built for the demon Chittarāja or Chittarāja. This is confirmed in Chapter 10th of the Mahāvamsa. This reference mentions that “the Kāvela Yakśa dwelled to the east of the city or built his devāla” (Mahāvamsa 10:84). Thus, it is clear that King Paṇḍukābhaya heard and performed the dance hymn in his garden not with a living person but with a demonic spirit. On the other hand, building a temple is not a tradition or a necessity for a live person.

The other important deity connected with the fertility cult is Vaisravana or Kuvera who is the god of wealth (- do -, ch.10, vv. 88 -89). The prominent place given to Kuvera in the Sculpture of the frontispiece (Wahalkada) of ancient dagabas in Sri Lanka suggests that he was very popular and sacred.

The sculptures in frontispieces which considered to be the first carvings of Sri Lanka, are another place where you can get an idea of the beliefs of pre-Buddhist Sri Lanka. It is not difficult to identify the princely dressed figure at the top of the pillars as Kubera, in the frontispieces of Kantaka Chethiya in Mihintale, Dhakkina Dagaba in Anuradhapura, Mirisaväetiya, Abhayagiriya and Deegawapi Stupa in Ampara decorated with ornate carvings. A dwarf or a bahirava wears a conch as a helmet on one side, and on the other is a dwarf who wears a Padma as a helmet. Two servants of Kubera are called Sanka and Padma. The coins falling from Kubera’s hand are also among these sculptures. The coins are also a symbol of Kubera. Since Kubera was the lord of wealth, it is reasonable to assume that these were pre-Buddhist memories of the practice of fertility. On the other hand, even after the advent of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, this is a piece of vital evidence to prove the existence of Hinduism. The image of Ganesha at the Kantaka Chethi in Mihintale also elaborates on this idea.

In conclusion I would like to state that the fertility cult and the connected religious beliefs was deeply rooted in the pre- Buddhist society of Sri Lanka.

There is no evidence of the existence of any other religion than Buddhism and Hinduism during the period of Polonnaruwa. This shows that the beliefs of Paribbrajaka and Ajīvaka etc., had faced a significant setback or had disappeared entirely by that time. Hindu power rose due to the colonization of Sri Lanka during the reign of Raja Raja. The fact that the king was a Sri Lankan and his consorts were Hindus may furnished this environment. The direct reference to Brahmins during the reign of Parakkramabāhu I is found in the chronicles. Afterward, during the Polonnaruwa period, the Mahāvamsa and other chronicles were almost entirely silent about other beliefs.

Conclusion:

According to the details in the Mahāvamsa, Hinduism was restored in Sri Lanka in the form of demonic religion, from Vijaya's arrival to the introduction of Buddhism.

A part from the Śivaism, the Ajivaka, Nighanṭha, and Pribbrājaka lived in this country with mutual understanding and harmony. Although the Mahāvamsa, the primary chronicle of Sri Lanka, gives us details about the religions of Pre-Buddhist Sri Lanka, it is silent in mentioning the other religions that prevailed after the introduction of Buddhism. The purpose of this should be to highlighted that the new religion was the greatest among the existing religions. The early carvings in Sri Lanka provide an excellent basis for studying the beliefs of Pre-Buddhist Sri Lanka. Hinduism is prominent here. The chronicles also mention the constructions related to the non-Buddhists in several places. The distinguishing feature is the religious beliefs opposed to Buddhism, such as water sports associated with these events. The garden games are often associated with water and garden games, Rathi Kṛīdotsava, and bold sacrifices. The dearth of evidence is observed during the Polonnaruwa and the period after that. The references to Brahmins are obliquely included in the chronicles during the reign of Great Parakkramabahau. That was the culmination of Hinduism.

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