

## **Relation Between India And Srilanka: Special Reference To Cultural Contribution In Ancient And Medieval Period**

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Sri Lanka was known to many countries in ancient and medieval times. It pursued an active foreign policy and established links with many foreign countries. Sri Lanka is mentioned in Greek and Roman writings dating from the third century BC by Kalisthenes, Oneskritus, Megasthenes, Strabo, and Pliny. Sri Lanka was included in the map of Asia, drawn in 150 AD by Ptolemy. The first recorded encounter between Rome and Sri Lanka took place during the reign of Claudius (41-54 AD) in Rome. Pliny has described the event. A Roman merchant had been shipwrecked in Sri Lanka. On his return to Rome, he took with him four ambassadors of the Sinhala king. However, there had been contact even before that. The *Mahavamsa* states that Bhatika Abhaya (BC 22 to 7 AD) had sent an embassy to Rome and got down coral for a net to be cast over the Maha Thupa.

The Sri Lanka king was recognised by North India. North India, during this period, included Pakistan, Bangladesh and a good part of today's Afghanistan. Devanampiyatissa (BC 250-210) sent an embassy to King Dharmasoka. The mission left from Jambukola near Point Pedro and arrived at Pataliputra via Tamluk in Bengal. Dharmasoka in return sent the items needed for the consecration of a king. The Sinhala King Kithsirimevan (301-328 AD) had sent a mission to the North Indian king Samudragupta, stating that he wished to build a rest house and monastery for pilgrims visiting Buddha Gaya. Centuries later, the Rajput mercenaries brought in by the general Mitta to depose King Bhuvaneka Bahu I (1272-1284) sided with the king and the rebellion failed.

Relations with South India were quite different. The two kingdoms meddled in each other's affairs. South India supplied mercenaries for several Sinhala kings who needed to fight for the throne.

The first was Ilanaga (33-34 AD) followed by Dathopatisa I (639-650). The Pallava king Narasinha Varman I, supplied King Manavamma, (684-718) with an army to challenge the ruling king, Dathopatisa II. Manavamma's son, Mahinda I (730-733 AD) was born in India. Lokesvara (1210-1211) also went to India and returned with a Tamil army.

However, there were also marriage links with South India. Queen Lilavati belonged to the Pandya line on her father's side. Vijayabahu I gave his sister in marriage to a Pandya prince, in preference to a Chola prince. There were trade and diplomatic links too. Parakramabahu I actively encouraged trade with South India. In his Nainativu inscription written in Tamil, he said that foreign merchants were welcome, and were assured of protection. The Sinhala king did not stick only to the eastern side of India. Vijayabahu I exchanged envoys and gifts with the Kannata, (Western Chalukya) king. The Chalukya region was in western India.

The Pandyas, Pallavas and Cholas of South India, were equally matched in political and military strength. There were continuous conflicts between them as they battled for supremacy in South India. Their power struggles overflowed into Sri Lanka. The Sinhala king usually sided with the Pandya kings against the Chola king. Kassapa V (14-23 AD) sent troops to fight on behalf of the Pandya king against the Chola king. Mahinda IV (956-72) had a successful campaign in India against the Chola king. Rajasimha Pandya fled to Ceylon with the crown jewels during the reign of Dappula IV (924-935).

Sri Lanka underwent several periods of South Indian rule. Tamil chiefs ruled in Sri Lanka in the first and second century BC. The specific periods are BC 103-89 and BC 48-44. There was a period of Pandya rule in the fifth century between 429-455. The Cholas occupied the Rajarata, from 1017 to 1070 AD. They captured Mahinda V and took him to India. Then came Magha of Kerala who ruled parts of the Rajarata from 1215 to 1232. Sri Lanka was also subjected to several shortlived invasions from South India. The Cholas invaded during the time of King Kalyanavati (1202-1208), Anikanda (1209), Lokesvara (1210-1211) and Lilavati (1197-1212). Jatavarman Sundara Pandya invaded around 1258. There was another Pandya invasion under Ariyachakravarti, around 1286. The bowl and tooth relic were taken away. Parakramabahu III (1287-1293) had to negotiate with King Kulasekhara to get it back.

Sri Lanka had trade links with Central Asian kingdoms such as Bactria and Gandhara. These are now a part of Afghanistan. Gandhara

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had trade connections with Sri Lanka in the first century AD. Coins from Bactria have been found in Ruhuna. Three inscriptions from Koravakgala at Situlpahuwa in the Hambantota district contain the word 'Kaboja'. The Kambojas were a native population in the western part of the Mauryan Empire speaking a language of Iranian origin. Persia (now Iran) was India's neighbour at this time. Persia's other boundary ended at the Mediterranean Sea. The western trade was controlled by Persia. Sri Lanka had trade links with it. Several Iranian records speak of an embassy from the Sri Lankan king to Iranian emperor Anusharwan (531-578). The King had sent him ten elephants, two hundred thousand pieces of teakwood and seven pearl divers.

Sri Lanka was one of the first states in Asia to initiate relations with China. Vernon Mendis says that this reflects very creditably on the stature and outlook of Sri Lanka. He says that India, China and Sri Lanka were the three foremost civilisations in Asia at this time. Chinese records indicate that China had established relations with Sri Lanka around the first century AD. However, the first reference to an embassy from Sri Lanka to China can be dated to the time of Gajabahu I (114-136). The next recorded visit as found in Chinese sources is a mission during the time of Upatissa I arriving in China in 414 AD. King Mahanama (410-432 AD) sent embassies in 428 and 430. Thereafter Silakala sent a mission which arrived in 527 AD. There were six recorded missions between 618-905, of which four were during the time of Aggabodhi VI (733-772).

From the 9th to the 12th centuries, there is one solitary recorded mission from Mahinda V in 989 AD. The missions picked up again thereafter. Between 1273 and 1294, there were five missions. Parakramabahu VI (1412-1467) dispatched six missions between 1416 and 1459. No other king had sent so many missions. More than one ambassador had been dispatched during this period. One was Jayapala Mudali who is mentioned in the Guttala Kavya. The items taken on these missions, referred to as local produce in the Chinese sources, included baby elephants, golden orioles, fine cotton cloth, gems, coral, gold, various kinds of fragrance, black pepper and medicines.

There were close trade relations between Sri Lanka and China. There are records of Sri Lankan ships in China in the 8th century. Chinese coins belonging to every emperor from 976 AD to 1265 AD have been found in Sri Lanka. Historian Mahinda Werake suggests that some of the ambassadors may have been merchants who were involved in Sino-

Sri Lanka trade. The goodwill of the Chinese emperor was necessary to conduct trade smoothly. Chinese sources referred to missions from foreign countries as 'tribute missions' since the Chinese looked down on all other countries. However, Sri Lankan historians are adamant that Sri Lanka was never under China.

Sri Lanka paid attention to diplomatic relations that would enhance external trade. Buvanekabahu (1272-1284) sent away an embassy from Yemen saying that he wanted diplomatic contacts with Egypt. His embassy to Egypt sailed up the Persian Gulf to Baghdad and was received in Cairo in April 1283. He wanted direct trade with Egypt and indicated the products he could supply. However since he was trading with Yemen he had wanted to have an envoy in Aden, too.

Sri Lanka also had diplomatic relations with the countries of Southeast Asia. These countries started to develop into sovereign kingdoms well after the fifth century. Sri Lanka established kinship relations with the Sri Vijaya kingdom. Mahinda IV (956-972) married a Kalinga princess from Sri Vijaya. So did Vijayabahu I (1055-1110). A succession of kings of pure Kalinga descent followed, starting with Nissanka Malla, (1187-1196). The Sri Vijaya kingdom, consisted of Java, Sumatra and a section of the Malay peninsula. It dated from the 5th century. It possessed immense seapower, having formidable naval strength. It dominated the Straits of Malacca and policed these waters against piracy. Sri Vijaya's only competitor in the Indian Ocean was the Cholas. Since South India was under Chola control, the Sinhala kings would have considered it advisable to establish links with Sri Vijaya.

Sri Lanka, Burma and Cambodia were engaged in trade in the Bay of Bengal area by the seventh century. Burma and Cambodia were rivals in trade. Sri Lanka had trade and diplomatic relations with both countries. Vijayabahu I (1055-1110) initiated the link with Burma. This was continued by Parakramabahu I and Vijayabahu II. Sri Lanka and Burma maintained envoys in each other's countries. There is some evidence of diplomatic contact with Cambodia too. A Sinhalese princess was sent to Cambodia during the time of Parakramabahu I and an inscription of Nissankamalla shows that he was friendly with Cambodia.

The Sinhala king was aware of the rise of Islam. Aggabodhi III (628-639) had sent a goodwill mission to Prophet Mohammed at Medina. The Prophet had died by the time the mission got there. On the way back, the king's messenger also died. It was left to the servant to convey

information to the king. This information is contained in the writings of the 10th century Iranian navigator, Ibn Shahryer. The Muslim writer Al-Biladuri stated that in the 8th century the Sinhala king had sent to the Caliph the orphaned daughters of Arab merchants who had died in the island.

Sri Lanka fought several wars. Sri Vallabha, the Pandya king, invaded Sri Lanka during the time of Sena I (833-853). He sacked parts of it, looted its valuables and went back. Sri Vallabha's son, rebelled against the father, and sought the assistance of Sena II (853-887). The Sinhala army entered South India, captured Madhura, placed the son on the throne as Varaguna II and returned with the valuables taken by the father, as well as some of the Pandya valuables. This battle is described in detail in *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon* (p. 487-506).

On an appeal from Parakrama Pandya, Parakramabahu I (1153-1186) sent an army under commander Lankapura to fight King Kulasekera. The army took Madhura, and got ready to crown Vira Pandya, the son of Parakrama Pandya. After a protracted battle Kulasekera defeated Lankapura and beheaded him. Undeterred, Parakramabahu got ready to invade again. An inscription says that Parakramabahu was building ships and assembling troops at various ports to make a fresh invasion of South India. The Chola king stopped this by sending an expedition which destroyed the preparations, set fire to the land, killed some Sinhalese chieftains and took others prisoner. The letters Parakramabahu sent to King Kulasekera were intercepted.

Historians think that Parakramabahu's wars against the Cholas may have helped the eventual collapse of the Cholas. Parakramabahu I supported any Pandya who was prepared to go to war against the Cholas. Nissankamalla (1187-1196) also invaded South India. The invasion was probably successful because we are told that the king had listened to music and dancing while there (*University of Ceylon History of Ceylon*, p. 523.) The last recorded invasion is that of Parakramabahu VI (1412-1467) who invaded a port in Tanjore because Sinhala traders had been humiliated there.

According to the *Culavamsa*, the Burmese king, Alaungsithu, had over a period of time shown antagonism to Sri Lanka. He had captured a Sinhala princess who was on her way to Cambodia. He had also ill-treated the Sinhala envoys and created difficulties for the Sinhala merchants in Burma, particularly about the export of elephants. So Parakramabahu I invaded Burma at Pegu in 1164. The invasion was

successful and the troops returned to Sri Lanka. W. M. Sirisena suggests that there may have been trade rivalry between Cambodia, Burma and Sri Lanka. Parakramabahu's expedition to Burma shows that he was able to intervene and give protection to the Sinhala merchants. A description of this raid could be found in the *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon* (p 473).

Sri Lanka also took on China. Cheng Ho (1371-1433) a Muslim of Arab-Mongol origin was the imperial envoy and admiral of the Chinese fleet. He made several voyages in the Indian Ocean and organised stopovers in Sri Lanka on several occasions. On his visit to Sri Lanka in 1411, he was challenged by Vira Alakesvara, who was ruling at Raigama at the time. Alakesvara had planned to lure Cheng Ho into the interior and ambush him. It was a clever strategy. But his plans were leaked to the enemy by his own people and this helped Cheng Ho. The battle raged for six days. Finally Alakesvara, his wife, children, and officers of his court were captured and taken prisoner to the Imperial court in Beijing. The Chinese emperor treated them well. He told them to select someone else as king and sent the whole lot back. The selected king did not last long. Parakramabahu VI then took over the throne. The description given of this event in the *Rajavaliya* is supported by Chinese sources.

