

Two Stories on Origin of Sinhalese as in the Records of Xuanzang

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ABSTRACT: In this research, the attention is made to compare the records of the Xuanzang with the chronicles of Sri Lanka, the Divyāvādāna, the records of Faxian and the Jātaka stories. Xuanzang reveals two stories regarding the origin of Sinhalese people. One of the stories is much more similar with the Mahāvamsā and the other is similar to that of the Divyāvādāna.

I. INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this research paper is to identify the authenticity of the historical facts compiled on Sri Lanka, by Xuanzang. He travelled to India in seventh century C.E. Although he wanted to visit Sri Lanka, he could not visit the island owing to a famine and political unrest in Sri Lanka. He visited Kānchīpuram, and there he met the chief monks of the Bodhimegehsvar and Abhayadrūstra with three hundred other fellow monks, who stayed in South India, owing to the famine and the political unrest that occurred in Sri Lanka. Xuanzang's records of Sri Lanka was based on, what he has heard from the above monks.

FIRST STORY

Xuanzang's description sheds light on two stories of the origin of Sinhalese. These two stories might have been taken by the two different historical traditions that exist in Sri Lanka. The first story has been taken from Maha Vihara tradition. As mentioned by the Xuanzang a king in India had a daughter. When she was sent to the neighboring kingdom to get married, a lion abducted her. They dwelled in the wilderness, in consequence they had two children. When the children are grown up, they were reluctant to stay in the jungle and they secretly came out of the jungle without informing their father, lion. There was no family left and their ancestral line was extinguished. All the people pitied them and immediately provided them with funds. The lion got tempered without seeing his family and started to kill villagers. The king was unable to settle this devastation caused by the lion. The king announced, "that whoever would catch the lion and free the kingdom from the disaster, would receive a high reward and be honored luxuriantly for his achievement". Finally the lion was killed by his son and after hearing the relation of the lion and the son, the children were expelled by the king from the county. The boat of the son was carried to Ratnadīpa and the daughter was carried to the west of the kingdom of Persia. Having killed the merchants eventually, the son of the lion was able to establish his power in Ratnadīpa. As recorded by the Xuanzang all the characters are anonymous. This lacunae can be filled by an examination of the vamsa tradition in Sri Lanka. As described in the Dīpavamsa the king's name was Vaṅga, king's daughter was Susīmā, the son's name was Siṅhabāhu and the daughter's name was Siṅhasīvale.¹ The story is quite compatible with the story of Dīpavamsa and the Mahāvamsa. The son of Siṅhabāhu by the name of Prince Vijaya had been banished from India as mentioned in the Vamsa tradition in Sri Lanka. Faxian doesn't mention the story at all.

THE SECOND STORY

There is another piece of information, regarding the origin of the Sinhalese, which is not highlighted in the Maha vihara vamsa tradition or the Theravada vamsa tradition. This story might have been taken from a tradition belonged to the Abayagiri. Xuanzang emphasized, this story is in the Buddhist texts. We can find this story only in the Divyāvādāna and the Jātaka.² This story is more compatible with the Siṅhalāvādāna, in Divyāvādāna. As mentioned in the text of Xuanzang there was a great merchant leader on the Jambu-continent called Sengjia, and his son was called Simhala. He embarked together with five hundred merchants, set to sea in order to collect jewels, and the wind drifted them on the waves until they reached the treasure-island. Thereupon the merchant leader had pleasure and amused himself with the queen of the rakṣa-women in that island. Each of

¹ Oldenberg Hermann (1992), 9:2.

² Fausboll. V (1962), no. 195, 89-91.

the other merchants also found a matching partner, and after a year, all the rakṣa-women bore a child. Then, one night, Siṃhala had a nightmare and knew that they were not in a lucky situation he secretly looked for a way out. He arrived at an iron prison and then heard the sound of wailing. He then climbed on a high tree and asked: "Who is retained here to make these sad complaints?" The inmates said: "Do you not know? The women in the city are all rakṣas. They said: "We heard that on the shore of the ocean there is a divine horse, and that if one implores, it sincerely, it will certainly save us all." When Siṃhala heard this, he secretly told the other merchants that they should go to the sea shore together and put their energy in looking for help. Thereupon the divine horse came and said to the men: "Each of you should grasp my mane and not look back; I will save you. The divine horse leaped up highly to its cloudy path and crossed over to the other shore of the ocean. When the rakṣa-women suddenly realized that their consorts had escaped they told each other about it and wondered where they could have gone; each of them took her child, went forth and back in the sky. Having encountered the merchants, they shed tears and started weeping. The merchants fell in love again, could not master their emotions. The rakṣa-women congratulated each other, took those merchants and carried them away. Only Siṃhala in his steadfast wisdom did not waver in his determination. Thereupon the rakṣa-queen returned to the Iron City without her husband and the child. The other rakṣa-women said to her that she is not capable enough to take her husband and wife back and should not live there. Then the rakṣa-queen took her own child, flew in front of Siṃhala and used all her seductive power to lure him into coming back. The rakṣa princess went to the Siṃhala's home and cheated his father too by convincing relation of the Siṃhala and the son. Siṃhala's mind did not change and he refuse by saying that she is a rakṣa.

Thereupon the rakṣa-woman accused Siṃhala before the king. The king was delighted by her delicate beauty and said to Siṃhala: "If you have to abandon this woman, leave her in the inner palace." Siṃhala said: "I am afraid that this will become a disaster. Because she is a rakṣa, she only partakes of flesh and blood." The king did not listen to Siṃhala's words. In the later half of the night she flew back to the treasure-island, summoned the other five hundred rakṣa-demonesses and went with them to the royal palace and killed everyone. The next day morning nobody knew the reason of this disaster. Siṃhala explained everything and having seen the distinguished features of the siṃhala, ministers helped him to become the king of this particular area. Later Siṃhala destroyed the Iron City and the iron prison, rescued the merchants and gathered many pearls and jewels. He recruited people to move to the treasure-island and live there, founded a capital and built settlements, and finally a kingdom existed there. According to the name of the king the kingdom was called Siṃhala.

The above story illustrates "The top of the gate-tower two banners were erected, indicating as signs luck or evil. In case of lucky circumstances the banner of luck moved, in case of evil matters the banner of evil moved".³ This could be admitted as modern days, the giving signals through flags might have existed in the pre historic period in Sri Lanka.

Although this story quite compatible with the Divyāvadāna, there exists few discrepancy. It is indisputably clear Xuanzang gives us the whole story, but Divyāvadāna doesn't reveal the whole story and it says, for the further clarification to refer the Rakshasi sutra.⁴ Either Divyāvadāna or Jātaka don't give us the full story of this. This lacunae can be only filled up by the records of Xuanzang. Faxian does not mention the story at all.

According to the previous story, Sri Lanka was ruled by a Rakshasi. This testifies that the administrative powers were vested even to the women. As mentioned in the Mahāvamsa goddess were worshiped by the people even in the 5th century B.C.E.⁵ The king Paṇḍukābhaya (5th B.C.E) has constructed house for the yaksani Valavāmukhī within the royal precincts and made early sacrificial offerings. It is undisputable that the women were privileged. It is completely different from the social structure that was existed in India by this time.

According to the Valāhassa Jātaka there were she goblins in the town called Sirisavatthu in Ceylon. These she goblins used to come to the merchants with the children on their hips in order to make them imagine that there is a city of human beings. Once the five hundred shipwrecked traders were disembarked and the she goblins came up to them and enticed them, till they brought them to their city. The chief she goblin took the chief man, and the others took the rest, till five hundred had the five hundred traders; and they made the men their husbands. When her man was asleep, the chief she-goblin rose up, and made her way to the house of death, slew some of the men and ate them. The others did the same. When the eldest she goblin returned from eating men's flesh, her body was cold. The eldest merchant embraced her, and perceived that she was a goblin. Then the chief trader with two hundred and fifty, who were ready to obey him, fled away in fear of the goblins. At that time, the Bōdhisattva had come into the world as a flying horse.⁶ From Himalaya he flew through the air

³ Rongxi Li (1996), 326.

⁴ Senevirathna N.A (1999), 467

⁵ Geiger Wilhelm (1950), 10:86.

⁶ Anderson, Catalogue of the Indian Museum, 189.

until he came to Ceylon. There he passed over the ponds and tanks of Ceylon, and ate the paddy that grew wild there. As he passed on thus, he thrice uttered human speech filled with mercy, saying—"Who wants to go home? who wants to go home?" The traders heard his saying, and cried—" We are going home, master ! "they climbed up, some laid hold of his tail, and some remained standing, with a respectful salute. Then the Bōdhisattva took up even those who stood still saluting him, and conveyed all of them, even two hundred and fifty, to their own country, and set down each in his own place; then he went back to his place of dwelling. The she-goblins, when other men came to that place, slew those two hundred and fifty who were left, and devoured them. Xuanzang's description illustrates the whole story of the above.

II. CONCLUSION

These two stories might have taken by the two different historical traditions that existed in Sri Lanka.

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On one side of a pillar in a Buddhist railing at Mathura, is a flying horse with people clinging to it, perhaps intended for this scene.