

Jain Relics in Kalugumalai

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Abstract

This paper presents a description of Jaina relics in Kalugumalai, historically a major Jain centre in Tamilnadu. The Sanskrit word Jina means ‘conqueror’ and this is used as a title attached to the revered beings, who are said to have controlled their passions and have obtained perfect knowledge and freed themselves from the bondage of Karma. Their preaching and principles are popularly known as Jainism. Their followers are known as Jains or Nirgrantha. The period of origin of Jainism is not clear. Anyhow it began to attain the place of monastic idealism from sixth century B.C. onwards. There were 24 Thirthankaras beginning with Rishabha and ending with Vardhamana Mahavira. Among them the last two, namely, Parakanatha and Mahavira, are treated as historical beings. Jaina relics are found in several places in Tamilnadu. Kalugumalai in southern Tamilnadu presents a variety of relics.

Keywords: Jainism, Jaina sages, Jaina relics, Kalugumalai, Tamilnadu.

Jina

The Sanskrit word *Jina* means ‘conqueror’ and this is used as a title attached to the revered beings, who are said to have controlled their passions and have obtained perfect

knowledge and freed themselves from the bondage of *Karma*.¹ Their preaching and principles are popularly known as **Jainism**. Their followers are known as **Jains** or **Nirgrantha**.² The period of origin of Jainism is not clear. Anyhow it began to attain the place of monastic idealism from sixth century B.C. onwards.³ There were 24 *Thirthankaras* beginning with Rishabha and ending with Vardhamana Mahavira.⁴ Among them the last two, namely, Parakanatha and Mahavira, are treated as historical beings.

Growth of Jainism in the South



There was a gap of two and a half centuries between the periods of the last two. During this period, Jainism grew in the number of followers and the religion became well-established. With the arrival of Bhadrabahu (Sranta Kavalin) with 12,000 Jains to the South, particularly to Sravana Belogola, by about 296 B.C. in search of some new favoured lands,⁵ Jainism gained an opportunity to find new avenues in peninsular India. From there the religious practitioners seemed to have migrated to the further South.⁶ There is a clear evidence of the movements of the Jains from Karnataka to the Kongu region, (Salem, Erode and Coimbatore areas), to the western fringes of the Kaveri Delta (Tiruchirapalli) southwards into Pudukottai region (Sittannavasal) and finally into the Pandya kingdom (Madurai, Ramanathapuram and UK Kingdom Tirunelveli District).⁷

¹ Elerhard Fischer and Jyotindra Jain, *Art and Literature of 2500 years of Jainism*, (1977), p.9.

² M.S. Ramasvami Aiyangar and Seshagiri Rao, *Studies in Indian Jainism*, (1922), P.10.

³ Sinclair Stevenson, *Heart of Jainism*, (1945), p.7.

⁴ Champakalakshmi, R. *Jainism in South India*, An unpublished M.Litt., thesis, Madras University, 1958, P.38.

⁵ Pillay, K.K., *Studies in the History of India with special Reference to Tamil country* (1979), p.94.

⁶ Champakalakshmi, R., *Historical Evidences of Jainism in India and in Tamilnadu*, *Tamilarasu*, (November 1974), P.7.

⁷ Desai, P.B., *Jainism in South India and some Jain Epigraphs*, 1957, p.71.

The Jains seem to have permanently settled in the extreme South of India, probably due to the conducive natural atmosphere, i.e., in and around the hills.⁸ They had their traces in places like Vijayamangalam, Thingalur, Dharmapuri, Mudikonda Cholan and Tirumurtimalai in Kongumandalam, Jinachi Kanchi Vedal, Perumandur, Cittanur and Tirumarungonrai of Tondaimandalam. Trichi and Karur in Cholamandalam and Sittannavasal, Tenmalai, Northamalai, Aliruttimalai, Tiruveneyil, Iruppaikkudi, Pallimadam, Anumanthakudi, Devipattinam, Tirukkattampalli, Ervadi, Virasigamani, Singikulam, Marukeltalai and Kalugumalai of Pandimandalam.

Kalugumalai, A Major Jain Centre



Among the above mentioned long list, only at Kalugumalai one can witness many Jain sculptures and inscriptions. Hence it could be treated as a significant Jain centre. So, an attempt is made in this article to note down the features of the Jain relics of Kalugumalai.

Kalugumalai is a rich abode of historical monuments along with Vettuvankovil. Jain relics with Vatteluthu Inscriptions and stone monuments were erected to record the history of this place. It is situated in the Kovilpatti Division of V. O. Chimdambam District, 21 kilometers from Kovilpatti and 20 kilometres from Sankarankovil of Tirunelveli District.

This city is called by different names such as Tenpalani, Kalukasalam, Uvanagiri, Kajamuhparvatham, Sampothi Kshetram. All these names are assigned on the basis of some

⁸ Raman, Dr.K.V. Jainism in Tondaimandalam, Journal of Institute of Traditional cultures, Madras p.149.

legendary stories.⁹ The unique feature of this place is that it contains a lot of Jain relics along with inscriptions on the northern side of the hill which testifies to the Jain influence in this area.

Impact of Jainism

The Jains, noted for their “aesthetic, rationalistic, ascetic and antibrahmanical doctrine,” endeavored to propagate and popularize their religion in the Tamil country. As Jainism was very influential for a long time in Tondaimandalam region probably because it was adjacent to Gangavadi, where Jainism was prominent¹⁰ it was equally influential in Kalugumalai as revealed by the many statues of the Jain teachers and the donations assigned to them, recorded in Vatteluttu inscriptions. Probably there existed a Jain school in Kalugumalai in 8th century A.D. since the Vatteluttu scripts are datable to this period.¹¹

Captivating Relic

The most captivating relic is the natural cavern available in the northern side of the hill. From there, people get the information that the Jain monks with their disciples lived in that natural cavern. The floor of the cavern has been plastered and that has completely spoiled historic values of that place, for there are ample chances for the availability of polished rock cut cave beds popularly known as **Panchavar Padukkai**. These are found even today at different places like Samanarmalai, Muttupatti, Tirupparankunram and Kongarpuliyankulam. In later years, in a part of this cavern, an Ayyanar temple was built and this stands concealing the figures of the Jain monks.

Bas-relief Structures

With regard to the sculptures found, they are all Bas-relief structures. They are carved nearly in rows. The figures stand to testify the fact that “though the Jains derived the existence of a supreme being, they regarded the practice of worshipping images of their

⁹ Velumani, K.S.K, (Ed), Gazetteer of India, Tamil Nadu State, Tirunelveli, Government of India, 2002, P.125.

¹⁰ S.I.I., Vol. V. p.121-134, as No.309-404.

¹¹ Since a separate chapter is assigned to the study of the Pandya inscriptions at Kalugumalai we have the details of those inscriptions in this succeeding chapter.

Tirtankaras as coeval with the foundation of their creed.¹² But here at Kalugumalai cavern, we have the figures of not only the Tirtankaras but also the figures of yakshas and yakshis who were the individual upasakas and Sasanadevatas (while the yakshas are carved with the ideas of attendant spirit independently,¹³ the yakshis are chisled to prove the theme that they are Vidhya devis or goddesses of learning due to the influence of Brahmanic female deities.¹⁴ The figures available here are, besides the Thirtankaras in the uniformly seated posture, Mukkudainathar, Parasunatha, Komundeeswarar and Padmavati.

The figures are all alive in appearance. From the inscriptions available at the bottom of the statues we are able to understand that they are mostly figures of preceptors carved by the students as a token of respect for their teachers. The similarity of the figures here with many elsewhere in Tamil Nadu, especially around Madurai, testifies to the contact that existed among the Jains of this area and outside. The absence of any reference to the donations of properties is in consonance with their basic tenet of avoidance of desire by the Jain monks.

Major Focus – In Memoriam

From the inscriptions under many of the Tirurnenis or Padimams or Perams¹⁵ (all meaning figures) it is learnt that they are carved either in memory of the visit of renowned Jain personalities from other areas to this place or done as native figures for the merit of its dead relatives. **Devan Sendan of Kalaiyur** has dedicated a statue in the name of his father **Kavithi Devan**. Pondangnalan hailed from the local area, i.e., Tirunechuram, has donated a status or the merit of his mother. Another local man called **Sendan Sendan** has carved a statue for his father Furajin Sendan, Maran Sattan of Tirunechuram has chiseled a statue for his son Sendan Setti. Milalur Kurathiyar has engraved to two statues, i.e. one for **Sirangikkuavadigal** and another one for **Gunanandhippariyar** in memory of their visits. A

¹² Majumdar, R.C., (ed.) / The Age of Imperial Unity, Vol.II, (1958), p.425.

¹³ Gupta, R.8., Iconography of the Hindus I Buddhists and.. Jains, (1976), p.175-176.

¹⁴ Ibid p.176

¹⁵ The inscriptions available below the figures contains reported occurrence of such terms.

Manakkial (student) had a figure in memory of his teacher Tirumalai. Arattanemi Padarar has dedicated a statue. Two statues for the merit of Tirunelchurathu Konlan Tamavanar and Puravinvelan were donated by their relative Paramanattan. In memory of **Kottunattu Perumbarrur Udhan Kaman** a local Kurathi has executed a statue. Sendangudiyan and Nakkankari the two relatives have dedicated two statues for **Duppankaman** and **Duppan Chettan** respectively. In the name of Elavenbarikkudi, Sendan, a lady called Kudarkurakkurathi has arranged to engrave a statue for Sriviiayakkurathiyar of Venbaikkudi. **Teehan Sengan** on behalf of Sendan Satti has made out two statues.

In Honor of Loved Ones

These statues reveal the Jain tradition of carving statues not only by loyal students but also by relatives in honour of their beloveds. Further, people from different places have made votive offerings in this place. It highlights the popularity of Jainism among the people at that point of time.

In addition to the above, there are a few other statues dedicated by private individuals to teachers. The following list will attest this fact.¹⁶

No.	Donor	To whom donated
1.	Periyirkudi Sattan Devan	Sri Gunasekara Padarar
2.	Tirunelchurattu Sendan Chari	Purawin Sendan
3.	Kaman Putpanandhi	Tirukottarru Padamulathan
4.	Malaikkulattu Sri Varthamana Perumanakkar	Srinandhi
5.	Disciple Santisenapperiyar	Tirukkottarru Udhanandhi Guravadigal.
6.	Kanagairra Adigal	Tirunarunkondai Paladeva I Kuravadigal
7.	Tiruchchanallur Kurathigal	Kotturnattu Perumbarrur Kuthankaman.

¹⁶ S.I.I., Vol. V. PP.121-134.

8.	Tirunelchurathu Maranpulli	Not given
9.	Tirunelchurathu Sendan Vellan	Not given
10.	Kalakkudi Kaman Kaman Cirunambi Kurandikkavithi	Not given
11.	Disciple Santhikesan	Not given
12.		Tirukkottarru
	Kaman Sattan of Tirunelchuram	Vimanachardirakkuravadigal
13.	Disciple Pavanandhipperiyar ¹⁷	Sattan Kaman
14.	Student Dayabala Periyadigal	Padikkamana Padarar
15.		Kadaikkattur Tirumalayvur
	Venbunattu Pereyirkudi Devan Sattan	Monipadarar
16.	Pereyirkudi Sendan Kaniyan Disciple Perunandhi Padarar	Not given.
17.		Not given
18.	Disciple Millalur Kurathyer	Puttanandhi Padarar
19.		Go student Kunamathi and their teacher Velar kudi Mutha
	Neduman tottattu Kunantangiyan Tirunelchunathu Kumarammallan	Arithaneni
20.		Not given
21.		Not given

The above facts testify the love and respect of the students for their teachers. The places Tirukkottaru, Tirumalayur, Pereyirkudi, Velarkudi and Kadaikkattur noted in the inscriptions were probably some of the Jain educational centres of those days. The terms Padarar, Periyar and Kuravadigal may mean the different grades of teachers and Kurathi, a female teacher. Manakkar and Perumanarkkan may denote different grades of students. The names of teachers are prefixed with the different areas they hailed from. The girl students were known as Manakki or manakkiyar.

Female Students and Female Teachers

¹⁷ Probably the author of the Tamil Granatic exposition, Nannul.

The terms like Kudar Kurathiyar, Elaneduchurathu Kurathiyar, Srivisave Kurathiyar, Palaivark kani Kurathiyar, Sendan Kurathi, Pitchai Kurathi, Pagur Kurathi, Milalai Kurathi, Tirupparuthi Kurathiyar, Tirwmalai Kurathi and Malanakkurathigal show that many female teachers or nuns from different places were staying there. This shows that Jainism had diluted in principles to the extent of admitting women in their order probably with a view to achieving popularity and revitalism amidst acute religious feud that prevailed between Saivism, Vaishnavism and Jainism.

Links between Jain Settlements

The mention of Venbaikkudinadu (Sattur) Karunilakkudinadu (Kovilangulan near Aruppukkottai), Munkilkudi Nadu, Kalakkudinadu, Nechuranadu, Idaikkalanadu, Venbunadu, Idaikkudinadu and Karaikkanadu show that there should have been a well knitted link among the Jain settlements of different regions. The donative inscriptions expressing this will also prove the existence of Jain settlements.¹⁸ The identical names found in this area and other places like Samanar hill and Muthuppatti hill (both near Madurai) also will testify to this fact.¹⁹

Deity in Kalugumalai – Similar to Hindu Traditions

It is also revealed from the inscriptions that the Jains of Kalugumalai had a prospective deity called Araimalai Alavar²⁰ and daily rituals were done in Hindu temples with lamps and food offerings.²¹ Donations are recorded in inscriptions for lighting lamps,²² and the people of that place have donated Ghee for burning those lights.²³ One Kunasekhara Padarar had donated. During the ninth and tenth centuries the Pandya rulers like **Srimaran Srivallabha** (815-862 A.D.), **Parantaka Vira Narayana** (862-905 A.D.) and Rajasimha II (905-920 A.D.) did their best to support Jainism. So it is clear “that Jainism was not overwhelmed so completely as Buddhism by the rising tide of Saivism and Vaishnavism in

¹⁸ Vedachalam, P., Kalugumalai Samenappalli, Kalvettu (1978), p.13-16.

¹⁹ Rangacharya, V., A Topographical list of the Inscriptions of Madras Presidency, p.1464-65.

²⁰ . Vedachalam, p.6

²¹ Idem.

²² A.R.No.196 of 1894.

²³ . A.R.No.863 of 1917.

the land".²⁴ The Pandya kings even appointed guards called Tirumalai virar and Parantaka Virar to protect such Jain relics at Kalugumalai.²⁵ This shows the status of Jainism during the ninth and tenth centuries.

Protected by Royal Patronage

Further Jainism was able to withstand the enmity of religious rivalries due to the Pandya royal patronage. It is also obvious Jainism did not vanish from the Tamil country totally even during the medieval period. It should also be mentioned that Jainism had witnessed the religious animosities and that was a prominent phenomenon during the period of the Bhakti Movement, i.e., existence of Jainism during that period of devotionism in different parts of Tamil country and especially at Kalugumalai enables us to note the perseverance of the Jain order with ups and downs during that critical period of Hindu revivalism.

Conclusion

The inscriptions and sculptures at Kalugumalai show that Jainism was a living religion in Tamil Nadu even during the medieval period. Kalugumalai was then an important Jain centre. The importance of this place has been both religious and cultural. This hill of moderate size has been the abode of at least three cults the Jainism, Saivism and the Murugan cult. There should have been a high water mark of activity among these three as revealed by the finest artistic production on behalf of each. Today Jainism has almost left Tamil Nadu, leaving behind only the great didactic/moral literary works and its monumental vertigos, of which the Bas reliefs of Kalugumalai will certainly find a significant place in any book in Indian art history.

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²⁴ Nilakanta Sastri, K.A., The Pandyan Kingdom (1972), p.84.

²⁵ A.R.No.863 of 1917.