

JAINISM IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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Abstract

The origin of Jainism is mystery. The Jains believe that Jainism is as old as Vedic religion. Vardhamana Mahavira is the founder of this religion. Kanyakumari has great historical heritage and Kanyakumar district is considered as the fertile place for the growth of civilization. There are evidences to show that the people lived here from very early period. Archaeological remains belonging to the Neolithic period are found in different places of Kanyakumar district. In addition to that, a huge amount of burial urns have been identified in Vilavancode Taluk. All though Kanyakumari is the sacred place for Hinduism, other religions like Christianity, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism have also established a hold in this district. Among those religion Jainism spread in this district during the early days of Christian era and it flourished during the 7th to 8th centuries A.D. Literary sources testify that places such as Chitharal, Thirunanthikkarai and Nagercoil were the important centres of Jainism. The Jain Temple of Nagercoil was converted into a Nagaraja Temple. Similarly, the Jain Cave Temple in Tirunandhikkarai was also converted into Siva Temple.

Keywords

Jainism, rock-cut cave Temple, Archeology, sculptures, scriptures, karma.

Introduction

In Kanyakumari District, Jain centres are established in different places like Chitharal, Thirunanthikkarai and Nagercoil. Among these, Chitharal appears to be the centre of Jainism in Kanyakumari District. Chitharal Jain centre in Kanyakumari District appears to be the regional headquarters of Jainism next to Seravanabelagola. A group of Dhigambaras Jains from North India visited Chitharal in 1977. The ancient Tamil literatures such as Naladiyar, Nanmanikadigai and Thirukadigam have references about the spreading of Jainism in Tamil Nadu. These books reveal that Jainism has flourished in Chitharal, Thirunanthikkarai and Nagercoil. The Archeological Department has taken care to preserve some of the records of the site at Chitharal. Jainism

flourished even before 7th Century A.D. "The Buddhists and Jains were roaming in the streets of Kottar" is mentions in Kattaru Pathikam. Nagercoil, Chitharal, Kurathiyarai, and Tirunandhikkarai were once the main centers of Jainism in Kanyakumari District.

Jainism in South India

Jainism had deep roots in Tamilnadu and the people of Tamilnadu were attracted by the faith. It rendered meritorious services for the development of Tamil literature. Silappathikaram, Naladiyar, Sivakachinthamani and Kural were the eminent Tamil Jain works. In 476 A.D. a separate Tamil Sangam was organized to spread Jainism.

A Jain monastery was established in Pataliputra in South Arcot District (modern Cuddlore). Pallava rulers patronized it. It contained scholars well-versed in Sanskrit and Prakrit. It flourished in the early half of the seventh century A.D. Thirunavukkarasar acted as the head of the monastery before his conversion to Saivism. Jainism in TamilNadu suffered a setback with the conversion of Mahendravarman I. After that the Pallava rulers and the Hindu saints acted against Jainism. As a result of the anti-Jain campaign the monastery at Pataliputra was destroyed and Siva Temple was built in its place.

Kanchipuram was another place of learning that flourished at a distance of ten miles from capital of Kanchipuram. It was a Digambara Jain institution. It flourished under the patronage of Simhavishnu and Mahendravarman. It began to decline due to the conversion of Mahendravarman I. Artificial caves with seven cells were discovered at Pancha Pandavamalai and Tiruppanmalai at Vedal in Arcot District. The inscription of Nandivarman II proved that it was a Jain centre where the land has been donated to this Temple. Two more natural caves were discovered in this hill. These caves were attached with mandapas. Among them, one mandapa served as monastery and the other as matha. The monastery contained 500 Brahmi languages. Similar caves were discovered in Annavasal and Vellimalai. All these caves contained inscription in Brahmi language. The Jain monks utilized these caves for their study and contemplation. Natural caves were also discovered at Tirumayam and Narthamalai. The caves were attached with monastatrics. In short, the Jains of this period denounced Vedas and tried their best to spread the Jain culture.

There are various views regarding the spread of Jainism in Kanyakumari District. Among them the most accepted view is that Jainism entered into this district due to the changed mentality of the Mauryan ruler Chandra Gupta Maurya. He ruled South India in the 3rd Century. He was an important ruler who patronized Jainism. He came to know about this religion through a Jain saint Badrabahu. He learnt Jain philosophy whole heartedly and was influenced by it in such a situation there was famine in the Mauryan Empire for about 12 years.

The Jain Philosophy:

Jainism does not hold that God is the creator, protector and exterminator of this universe. The motive and purpose of Jain worships are very different from other religions. In fact, world seems both unnecessary and futile. Jains do not worship to gratify Gods or for getting something from Gods in return. But Jains do worship at a superficial level.

- There is something called the living.
- There is something called the non-living.
- The two come in contact and leads to the production of some energy.
- The contact of the two could be stopped.
- The existing energies could be exhausted.
- Salvation could be achieved

The living and non-living by coming into contact with each other and leads certain energies which bring about birth, death and various experiences of life. The holiest symbol of Jaina is a simple swastika. Another important symbol is a wheel on the palm of a hand symbolizing ahimsa. Swastika – signifies peace and well-being shravatsa – A mark manifested on the center of the Jaina signifying the pure soul. Darpana – The mirror reflects one's true self because of its clarity, kalasha pot filled with pure water signifying wisdom and completeness; by vary a large swastika with nine corners.

The conception of Karma is a special feature of Jaina thought. The karma is synonymous with the action. The soul has been in association with karmic from time Jaina religion is free the soul from karma. The first two karmas obstruct knowledge and insight, the third inflates the Soul, the fourth gives rise to life, the sixth shapes the body, the seventh fixes family and the eighth brings about hindrances of various kinds.

Ethics of Jainism

To prevent karmic particles and tainting the soul, Jainism teaches five ethical duties, which it calls five vows. These come in two main forms, the mahavratas (great vows) for Jain mendicants and anuvratas (small vows) for Jain laypersons. The Five vows, which are taken by Jain laypersons, are:

1. Ahimsa "non-violence", "non-harming", and "non-injury"
2. Satya, "truth"
3. Asteya, "not stealing"
4. Brahmacharya, "celibacy"
5. Aparigraha, "non-possessiveness"

Jain ascetics are even more careful regarding the vows, for example, regarding the ahimsa, they will often carry a broom or another tool to sweep the floor of small animals in front of them.

Jain centers

In Kanyakumari District, Jain centres are established in different places like Chitharal, Thirunanthikkara and Nagercoil. Among these, Chitharal appears to be the centre of Jainism in Kanyakumari District.

Nagaraja Temple:

The Nagaraja Temple in Nagercoil town of Kanyakumari District was once an important Jain centre. It is the ancestral town of 7th Century A.D. In those days Nagercoil area was referred to as Kottaru. It was actually a Jain Temple. It was converted as a Hindu Naga temple after the time of the King Bhutalavira Marthanda Varma Maharaja. Twenty years ago K.V. Soundarakan found six Jain images in worship in this Temple and two brass images of a later period depicting Parsavanatha and Yakshi Padmavati in standing posture. The first author has seen four sculptures in his younger days. One could not trace the brass images and some sculptures despite the best efforts of the Archaeological Officer, Tirunelveli. The gateway to the Temple seen now is in typical Kerala style.

The Jain sculptures of Parsavanatha and Thirthankaras found on the pillars in front of the Nagaraka shrine attest the fact that Jainism was there as late as 16-17th Centuries, Kottar was a commercial centre of the past. Ptolemy's geography and Pliny's Travels clearly indicate that it was one of the most important cities at the beginning of the Christian era. The ancient city took its name Nagercoil from the five headed serpent shrine of Nagaraja which is situated in the heart of the present town. The Serpent Shrine of Nagercoil, which is considered to be a Hindu Temple, was originally a Jain Temple.

Thirunandikkara

Thirunandikkara, a village 17 k.m. from Kuzhithurai contains an ancient rock-cut cave Temple having an image of Siva and structural monument dedicated to the same God. To show that the rock-cut cave Temple was a Jain Temple there are epigraphical evidences up to 9th Century A.D.

At Thirunandikkara the inscription in the rock-cut cave Temple mentions the name of the Ay king Vikramaditya Varagunan and his activities. Probably, Viranandi Adigal of Melapalli Temple at Thirunarungandai in the present Villupuram District who engraved a votive image at Thirucharanathumalai directed the hewing of the rock-cut cave Temple standing at a place nearly 10 k.m. from Thirucharanathumalai. The river flowing in front of the hill came to be known as Nandiyar because of his stay at this place.

The foot print worship is a common feature in Jainism. Therefore, Sir Monier Williams has written in his book "Buddism" that, "Jainas are quire rodent foot print worshippers." Nearly every shrine at the

summit of Mount Abu consisted of a little domed canopy of marble covering two foot prints of some one of the 24 Thirthankaras (especially Parsavanath) impressed on a marble altar. Groups of worshippers bowed down before the shrines and deposited offerings of rice, almonds, money, raisins and spices on the foot-marks.

Cave Temple at Chitharal

Chitharal is a village situated about 4 miles to the North-West of Kuzhithurai, formerly the headquarters of Vilavancode Taluk in the southern division of Travancore. Near this village there is a small hill called the Thirucharanathu Malai. There is a natural cave on the top of the hill formed by an overhanging rock resting upon another. This cave has been developed by masonry work into a temple.

The Village Kurathiyarai is situated 19 kms North of Nagercoil in the road leading to Kadukkarai near Azhakiyapandipuram in Thovalai Taluk, Kanyakumari District. A unicellar Cave-Temple known as Chenthipparai is situated on the Kuravan Thattupparai.

The legacy of Jainism is commendable. People participated in all fields. Jainism promoted art and architecture. Jain scriptures are produced by the learned religious leaders protecting its very ancient legacy. There is a rich cultural legacy in the form of sculptures, paintings, scriptures and arts. The world famous Ellora Caves is the legacy of Jainism.

The Jain Festivals

The major festivals of the Jains are related to the auspicious occasions of the life of area masters of Jainism. These occasions are (i) descent in the mother's womb (garbhadharana, cyavana) (ii) birth (Janma) (iii) renunciation (diksa) and (iv) attainment of omniscience (kevalajnanna) and (v) death and final emancipation of Jina.

Conclusion

Man is given the highest status in Jainism. There is no God in the ordinary sense of the term, but if the word God has any meaning it is applicable to man self. The Jaina answer in these questions is that man in his present state is in bondage. Like the Buddhists, the Jains built, Bjikshisugrihas or cave dwelling for the resident of their monks. The rock-cur Cave Temple by the Jains was then converted into a Hindu shrine. During this period the peedam containing the foot-prints was removed and an image of Sivalingam might have been installed.

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