

JAIN MONUMENTS IN TAMIL NADU - A STUDY

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Jainism as a religion flourished in Tamil Nadu as early as about 2nd - 1st century B.C.¹ and even today it is followed in some pockets throughout the state. The important Jain centres in Tamil Nadu have been classified, mainly based on the occurrences of the inscriptions or the existence of Jain monuments.

1. **Aiyyam Palayam** in the Palani taluk of the Dindigul district bears Jain vestiges in the form of a natural cavern that was inhabited, and the presence of a large number of Jain images. On Palaeographic grounds, its inhabitation is considered to some extent to a span of 4 centuries from the 7th - 10th century A.D.²

2. **Mettu Patti** (Siddar Malai) in the Nilakottai taluk has a huge cavern with two rows of five beds carved on the sloping rock, each with a pillow on the left. Brahmi inscriptions datable to the 2nd - 1st century B.C. engraved on the head side of the beds, can be taken to be the names of the resident monks of the monastery.³

3. **Ananda Mangalam** in the Madurantakam taluk of the Chingleput district is named after **Ananthanatha Tirthankara**, whose image is sculptured along with those of other Tirthankaras and their attendents. A Jain temple **Jinagiri Palli** datable to the Chola period also exists there.⁴

4. **Tirupparuthi Kuntram**, in the Kanchipuram taluk of Chingleput district is also known as **Jain Kanchi**⁵ and is one of the most important Jain centres in Tamil Nadu. The **Trailokyanath temple** is a Jain monument bearing a number of inscriptional records regarding its maintenance and construction.⁶ Exhibiting essentially the Chola architectural

features, it had its origin in the Pallava times and had received patronage of the Vijayanagar Emperors also.²⁵⁵

5. **Kalugumalai** situated in the Kovilpatti taluk of Tuticorin District, apart from having natural caverns, also possesses Jain images which were erected by a number of disciples, as per inscriptional evidences.⁷ The celebrated contact between **Tirupparuthi Kuntram** and **Tirunarumgondai** was well established as early as 8th century A.D. is also known through the inscription.

6. **Vira Sikamani** in Srivaikuntam taluk of Tutucorin District has stone beds in a cave with engraving of a single foot print and a couch, **Sri Suriya Aduman Jinendra** seems to be an important mark who lived in this cave.⁸

7. **Kovilankulam** in the Aruppukottai taluk has a ruined **Jain temple, Ambalappa Swami** of the Chola period. Metallic images of the God and **Yakshi** were presented by some individuals. From inscriptions, it can be gleaned that it was a flourishing Jain centre.

8. **Citharal** also known as **Tirucharanathumalai** in Vilavankodu taluk of Kanyakumari District has a number of Jain images that were sculptured by Jain disciples around the 9th century A.D.⁹ From inscriptions, it is learnt that it had contact with far flung Jain centres like **Tirunarumgondai**.

9. Nagaraja Koil of Nagercoil in Agastheeswaram taluk of Kanyakumari District, during the 16th century A.D. received patronage for the upkeep and maintenance of Jain temple from the royal house of Travancore.¹⁰

10. Alagar Malai in the Melur taluk of Madurai District, has a huge natural cavern in which, many carved beds with the names of the occupants inscribed in Brahmi script datable to the 2nd - 1st century B.C. and also some Jain images of a later period are found.¹¹ The size of the cavern indicates that it was selected to accommodate a large community.

11. Anai Malai in Madurai District is considered to be one amongst the eight sacred Jain hills in Tamil Nadu by the Digambara Sect.¹² A natural cavern with carved stone beds inscribed in Brahmi speak of Jain presence in the 1st - 2nd century A.D.; yet it reached its zenith only in the 9th century A.D. when a number of pious devotees contributed their mite in developing it into a Jain settlement. This is seen through the predominance of images in the Jain cult.¹³

12. **Aritta Patti** in Melur taluk in Madurai District has not only a natural cavern indicating Jain presence in the 2nd - 1st century B.C. but also Jain images of a Tirthankara canopied by a triple umbrella of the 9th century A.D. highlighting Jain dominance, by virtue of which it came to be known as **Tiruppanaiyan Malai**.¹⁴

13. **Kilakkudi**, otherwise known as **Settipodavu** in Madurai District was a Jain establishment presided over by the monk **Guna Sena Deva**, around the 9th century A.D. Stone beds and Jain images mark its importance.

14. **Kila Kuyil Kudi** in Madurai District has revealed through inscriptional evidences that Jain monks from **Sravanabelagola** had visited this place to preach Jain tenets.¹⁵

15. **Kilavalavu** in Melur taluk of Madurai District, by presence of a large number of beds within small radius may prove that it had a large congregation of ascetics. Even during the 9th century A.D., images portray the presence of Jainism.

16. **Mankulam** in Madurai District has a cluster of caverns which formed the Jain establishment presided over by the monk **Kaninanta**. A number of beds hewn out of stone have been noticed dating back to the 2nd - 1st century B.C.¹⁶ A merchant guild of **Vellarai** also bestowed its patronage on Jainism.

17. **Mettupatti** in Madurai District enjoyed jain patronage, right up to the 9th century A.D. In the earlier phase, (1st - 2nd centuries A.D.) it is known from the inscriptions that contact between Jains in Ceylon and Tamil Nadu existed.

18. **Tirupparankunram** in Madurai District through epigraphical sources, proves that cardinal relations existed between Jain adherents of **Elam** (Ceylon) and Tamil Nadu in the early centuries of the Christian Era, as a house holder from Ceylon created a rock bed here.¹⁷

19. **Varichiyur** in Madurai District contains a large number of stone beds and through inscriptions, they can be dated between 2nd century B.C. and 2nd century A.D.

20. **Bomma Malai** in the Kulattur taluk of Pudukottai District had Jain establishments known as **Tiruppalli Malai** (the mount of the holy monastery), the **Then Tiruppalli Malai** (the mount of the holy monastery in the south). The deity bore the name **Tiruppallimanaiyagar**.

21. **Nattarmalai** in Kulattur taluk of Pudukottai District had a jain temple¹⁸ presided over by the deity **Arha deva** of **Tirumanai malai**.

22. **Sittannavasal** in Kulattur taluk of Pudukottai District was the most famous Jain centre.¹⁹ It has a natural cavern with chiselled beds. It flourished as a stronghold of the Jains from 2nd century - 1st century B.C. to the 8th century - 9th century A.D. It is also accepted that some ascetics of the Jain persuasion migrated to the extreme south from Karnataka to propagate the gospel of the Jains.

23. **Tirunarumgondai** in Ullundurpet taluk of South Arcot District is one of the most important places of pilgrimage for the Jains of Tamil Nadu.²⁰ The natural cavern on the hill contains a number of stone beds. A little to the north of the cavern, is the **Appandinatha temple** with shrines meant for **Parsvanath** and **Chandra Prabha**. This jain temple has been

patronised by the Cholas, the Pandyas and their feudatories²¹. **Tirunarumgondai** seems to have had a Jain mutt presided over by Jain monks in medieval times.

END NOTES

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