

An Historical Enquiry on Jain Traditions in Kanyakumari with Special Reference to Chidharal Malai Kovil

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Abstract

The temples where Hindu Gods and Goddesses are enshrined are the real pillars and protected forts of Hinduism. They have the greatest influence in strengthening the spiritual and cultural aspects of our country. Our ancestors have sacrificed their lives for the construction and maintenance of these temples. Our sculptures, music, dance, mantras and every aspects of our culture were dedicated to God in temples. Indian temples are thus the standing monuments of the everlasting spiritual and cultural heritage of our country. Chidharal Malai Koil or Thiru Charanathu Malai is one among the Jain temples found at the top of a mountain in Kanyakumari District. It is a small mountain covered by thick vegetation and heavy rocks. It has 400 feet height and gives a unique panoramic view of the entire Kanyakumari District. Since 9th century, it was grown under royal patronage. Jainism was flourished in Kanyakumari district from 8th to 16th centuries. Many kings offered lands as pallichantham to the Jains as their patronage to Jainism. Raja Raja Chola I offered lands to Jains. Once it was a big city and likely to be an university in Chidharal known as Madathu vilai or Madathu veedu.

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INTRODUCTION

Temples formed the nucleus of social life in the country. They integrated the various segments of the society from diversity. Temple is a place of worship. A sacred house of gods and goddesses, it catered to the religious needs of the people and provides a link between man and god and the earthly life and the divine life. Worshipping gods in temples not only infuses divinity and purity to the heart of the devotees but also it is natural outlet of their religious impulses and sentiments. They believed that if gods and goddesses were appeased, there would be rain and prosperity. So the heavenly beings were pleased with offerings of *abhishekhas* (sacred bath) oblations, rituals and festivals according to *agamic* prescriptions. Chidharal Malai Koil or Thiru Charanathu Malai is one among the Jain temples found at the top of a mountain in Kanyakumari District. It is a small mountain covered by thick vegetation and heavy rocks. It has 400 feet height and gives a unique panoramic view of the entire Kanyakumari District. Since 9th century, it was grown under royal patronage. Jainism was flourished in Kanyakumari district from 8th to 16th centuries. Many kings offered lands as pallichantham to the Jains as their patronage to Jainism. Raja Raja Chola I offered lands to Jains. Once it was a big city and likely to be an university in Chideral known as Madathu vilai or Madathu veedu.

NEED FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

Temple is a place of worship. A sacred house of gods and goddesses, it catered to the religious needs of the people and provides a link between man and god and the earthly life and the divine life. Kanyakumari District is having temples of great antiquity and cultural importance. Temples also functioned as a source of history. Music and dance formed a regular part of the temple festivals. Educational institutions were also run by the temples The South Indian temples have always played a vital role in the religious, social, cultural and economic life of the people. In this context, it is possible to bring in to light the unique nature of the famous Shiva temples of Kanyakumari District. The present investigation is passing light on the “**AN HISTORICAL ENQUIRY ON JAIN TRADITIONS IN KANYAKUMARI WITH SPECIAL REFERECE TO CHIDHARAL MALAI KOVIL**”

The South Indian temples have always played a vital role in the religious, social, cultural and economic life of the people. While singing the glory of our motherland, the national poet Subramania Bharathi says : *All the nations in the world it is Bharat that nurtured the highest culture and civilization.* From his words we learn that India had been considered as a holy piece of land in the whole world. Why India is called a holy land? Why it is known as *Punya Bhoomi* (Holy Land) ? In his poem Bharathi has given a list of reasons why India is called as a holy

land. The first and foremost feature of India is its divine affinity. The poet says that India is a land of temples which elevate the people to spiritual dignity.

The temples where Hindu Gods and Goddesses are enshrined are the real pillars and protected forts of Hinduism. They have the greatest influence in strengthening the spiritual and cultural aspects of our country. Our ancestors have sacrificed their lives for the construction and maintenance of these temples. Our sculptures, music, dance, mantras and every aspects of our culture were dedicated to God in temples. Indian temples are thus the standing monuments of the everlasting spiritual and cultural heritage of our country.

The main parts of a temple are, (1) Garpagraha (Sanctum Sanctorum)(2) Vimana (3) Ardha mandapa (4) Prakaras and (5) Gopura (Tower). Indian temple is only a reflection of the physical form of a man.

One can find different types of art and architecture in the temples of Kanyakumari District. The melodies sound produced by the musical pillars of Suchindrum temple, the beauty of the 145 wooden panels depicting the story of Ramayana found in the Ramaswamy temple at Padmanabhapuram, the exquisite wooden carvings of Udayamarthanda mandapa in Thiruvattar temple, the religious integration of Nagaraja temple at Nagercoil and the cultural integration of twelve Shivalayas are the important features of the temples in Kanyakumari District.

Architecturally we find several types of temples in Kanyakumari District. The Nagaraja temple of Chera style, Cholarajakoil of Chola style and the Suchindrum temple of Pandya style clearly show the impact of Chera, Chola and Pandya rule in Kanyakumari District. There are several temples with conical vimana of Kerala style in Kalkulam and Vilavancode taluks of Kanyakumari District. There is a natural cave temple at Chitharal hill and a rock-cut cave temple at Thirunandikkarai. The two tired conical vimana in the Mahadeva temple at Palliyadi is unique.

Kanyakumari District is having temples of great antiquity and cultural importance. Temples also functioned as a source of history. Music and dance formed a regular part of the temple festivals. Educational institutions were also run by the temples. A copper plate inscription dated A.D.866 informs us that an institution of learning in literary and martial arts was established in the campus of the Vishnu temple at Parthibhasekarapuram. The temple of Nagaraja at Nagercoil which unifies the four streams of Indian religion Saivism, Vaishnavism, Jainism and Buddhism is a fine example of religious integration. we have seen the Hindu temples were not only places of worship but the very focus of society. Chidharal Malai Koil or Thiru

Charanathu Malai is one among the Jain temples found at the top of a mountain in Kanyakumari District.¹ It is a small mountain covered by thick vegetation and heavy rocks. It has 400 feet height and gives a unique panoramic view of the entire Kanyakumari District. Since 9th century, it was grown under royal patronage. Jainism was flourished in Kanyakumari district from 8th to 16th centuries.² Many kings offered lands as pallichantham to the Jains as their patronage to Jainism.³ Raja Raja Chola I offered lands to Jains.⁴ Once it was a big city and likely to be an university in Chideral known as Madathu vilai or Madathu veedu.⁵

Past Glory:

When Chou-en-lai, the Chinese Prime Minister, had enquired about Thiru Charanathu Malai or Jain monastery with the late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru during his visit to China, Nehru was taken aback to the utter surprise of the Chinese primer. This vihara was known as Thiru Charanathu Palli or Thiru Charanathu temple.⁶ In the year 1977-78, during the time of Prime Minister of Sri. Morarji Desai, one group of Bhikkus or Bhikkunis visited this temple on camels in their Jain attire but they were not accepted by the local people. However, the Jain monks had not opted to do worship inside the vihara because it was claimed to be polluted by idol worship by the Hindus and so they left the place.⁷

Thiru Charanathu Malai or Chidharal malai Koil:

Thiru Charanathu malai is situated in Vilavancode Taluk, 7 km North from Marthandam. It is otherwise called as Chidharal malai Koil.⁸ From 8th century onwards various religious activities were undertaken and Vikramathitya Varaguna, King of Aay Dynasty, patronised them from 9th century. Jainism (Digambara sect) was grown under a royal patronage.⁹ Narayana Kurathi offered a lamb and golden flower to Thiru Charanathu malai.¹⁰ There was a university also functioned well, where the woman monks also taught to decay illiteracy of the people and the students spread the ethical principles among the people.¹¹ The special features of that place are the statues of Eakki, Eakkan, Parsuvanatha, snake umbrella, lion face, snake worship, heroic women, worker sedipen, semi-goddess, statues of tirthankaras and Statue of Mahavira. There is also a kitchen, 3 treasuries, artha mandapam, Maha mandapam, a tunnel, a water source and a vimana and a Naga or snake worship place. The statue of padmavathy was broken and a treasury was converted into Devi temple.¹² At present, this temple is under the control of Tamilnadu Archaeological Department since 1958.¹³ There are 17 inscriptions found out in Thiru Charanathu malai and among them 12 were directly related with Jainism and the rests were inscribed after their conversion into Hindu temple. The latest one is laid on October 19, 1913 by Sri Moolam Tirunal, the King of Travancore.¹⁴

Depiction on the wall and inside of Monastery:

Seated posture of Arugans under a canopy of umbrella are 10, lions face 3, Thirthankaras 3, eight lamb chambers indicates 8 families or clans of Mahavira (24th thirthankara) and Mahavira's standing naked posture, respected women with crown were prevailed. Inside of the monastery, the idol of Parshawanth (23rd thirthankara), Mahavira followed by a Padmavathi on the three chambers. But the padmavathi statue was replaced by modern Devi statue (Kerala model) by the recent renovation work made by the archaeological Department.¹⁵ A tunnel was found in the North-West corner likewise the palaces of Padmanabhapuram, Eraniel had. There is a tank in which the symbol of Pandiya king, fish found. There were 2 statues of Kaali before the entrance of vihara.

Inscriptions:

There are 3 blocks of inscriptions, two smaller edicts are partly erased out and the rest is clear. All are written in vatteluthu. A lot of pieces of inscriptions were missed, scattered and chiselled out. Erosions and tampering are increased and also many additions increased.

Other sub-centres of Jains:

Devendran malai, Malayadi, Kottavilai, Velimalai, Alwar coil and Kurathiyarai were sub stations of Jains in Kanyakumari district. Among them Kurathiyarai is prominent.¹⁶

Special features of Jain culture:

Naaga worship or Snake worship, Devi worship or Eeyakki worship, wishing word 'swastigam sree', names like alwar, padaari, padarar...animal worships like tortoise, lion, birds...foot worship, Sastha worship and anchinaan pugavidam.

Naaga worship is generally found in all the Jain centres and then it was used to worship in all the Siva temples. Eayakki is also found in Chidharal and other places. Alwar name is commonly used by the Jains before the Vaishnavites utilised it their followers as Alwars.¹⁷ and Alwar name is used to indicate their services and confirmed that it was used Jains prior to Vaishnavites.¹⁸ Wishing word 'Sastigam Sree' was inscribed before the information entered into the inscriptions. They were fervently found in Kanyakumari district inscriptions up to 17th centuries.¹⁹ Animal symbols like lion found in Chidharal and tortoise found in Nagaraja temple. When the Jains were converted into other religions, they adopted their culture into their new culture because they were the vehicles of Eayakki and angels.²⁰ Foot worship is the main feature of Jainism which was still found in Kanyakumari where Vivekananda got enlightened after worshipping it.²¹ Sastha worship is a special feature of Jainism. Later, Shastha is added to many Hindu gods as names after the 9th century.²²

Sabarimalai Iayyapan is known as Shastha. Anchinaan Pugalidam is the safe place where the Jains attempted meditation to attain 'Saadana'. It can be used during meditation, pasting and other religious activities for realisation.²³ There were a lot of such centres prevailed in Kanyakumari district in Veera Kerala Nallur,²⁴ Muttam,²⁵ Agasteeswaram,²⁶ Padmanabhapuram and other places.²⁷

Decline of Jainism:

Jainism began to decline after the arrival of Thiru Gnana Sambanthar in the 9th century.²⁸ The Jains were forcefully converted into Sivaites and Vaishnavites. The Jains preached love and passion and so they never opposed them and so some of them migrated to North and the rests were converted into other religions.²⁹ The Jain texts were burnt and thrown into the river to decay the growth of Jains.³⁰ Their centres were ruined, they were hanged them, make them as prostitutes and slaves during the 8th and 9th centuries. The history of killing 8000 Jains in a single day in order to establish Hinduism during the times of poet Thiru Navukkarasar along with the Pandyan king.³¹ The religious debates broke down in Kanyakumari district after the 9th century. The Sivaites and Vaishnavites unanimously joined together and opposed Jains because they had a glorious growth. As a result, the Sivarathi or Sivalaya Ottam was a symbol of their unity reciting as 'Kovala Kovintha' and many Siva temples have a particular position to Vishnu.³²

Conclusion:

Jains glorious past was denied, hidden, ruined, destroyed and their history was bended and forgotten. Only a few sources were left like literatures and inscriptions which reveal their unavoidable role played in history. Their services to human kind are inseparable from the life of Kanyakumari people. Anyhow their services in the field of medicine, education and sculpture are still continuing in the district. Jainism was flourished up to 16th century. Since then, it began to decline and totally ruined before 19th century. Their main centres were converted into Hindu temples through rub it up of a culture from Kanyakumari District.

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