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Jain Vestiges Recently Discovered in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Tamil Nadu is one of the high-yielding states of antiquities such as sculptures, bronzes, copper plates, coins, etc. Recently, a few Jain images have been discovered from different parts of Tamil Nadu from the 3rd-4th centuries A.D. to the 13th century A.D.As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned the spread of Jainism appears to have taken place from 5th 4th Century B.C. as a considerable number of ancient Tamil inscriptions mentioning the donation of rock beds to the Jain monks are found engraved either on the rock beds or at the surroundings of the natural cav-erns of the mountains lying in various districts of Tamilnadu. But no sculpture of either Jain Gods or the Jain monks of this period has so far been found. The earliest specimen of Goddess prob-ably an Yakshi of Jain origin is assignable to 3rd-4th centuries A.D. while the Tirthankaras found carved on Thirunathar Kunru near Gingee in Villupuram District, are assignable to Cir. 5th-6th Centuries A.D. Some scholars are of the opinion that the Tirthankaras of Thirunathar Kunru belong to the 8th Century A.D. A number of Tirthankara figures assignable from the 8th century onwards have been located especially in Pandinadu.

Keywords: *Tirthankaras, sculpture, Amarapuram, Nerkunram, Kanchipuram, arthapariyankasana.*

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Introduction

Hence it can be firmly said that the advent of Jainism first appeared in Tamilnadu during 5th-4th century B.C. and slowly spread in the subsequent period inspite of stiff opposition from Saiva Nayanmars and Vaishnava Alvars during 5th, 6th and 7th centuries and blossomed in full form from 8th century onwards. Since the Jain monks had lived in isolated hillocks it seems that they could not preach their doctrine, freely among people during pre-Christian era. But in the post Christian era they were able to penetrate into the interior populated area and compel a section of the population, especially the merchant community to embrace Jainism.

This religious impact had influenced them to build a number of Jain temples and produce many sculptures and bronze images. It seems that wherever the merchant community lived they either carved out exquisite panel sculptures or produced beautiful sculptures in round or cast elegant bronze images for wonship. The existence of such outstanding figures are being lo cated year by year in Tamilnadu. The following are the recent invaluable discoveries:

1. UNIQUE YAKSHI SCULPTURE

The outstanding sculpture of an Yakshi was discovered in the first week of January 1999 at Kadaimalaipputtur, a small village in Kanchipuram District.1 It is a colossal image measuring to 1.50 Metre height installed at the side of a road which leads to Vandavasi (Wandiwash) from Toluppedu. This remark-able figure is worshipped as Korravai by the local people.

Standing in samabhanga pose wears a crescent shape jatabhandam with a bell like coiffure over it. The long bow like eye with almost closed eyelids, protruding nose, tight lips, hang-ing ears wearing something like ornaments help the jug shape face to look calm and serene. Having two hands in proportion-ate thickness, the left is held in lola hasta position while the right in abhaya mudra. Both the hands are found wearing bangles on shoulders and forearms and with spreadout fingers. The round big breasts, the triangle shaped stomach, the broad hip and the banana trunk like legs give a crude form suggesting its antiquity to an earlier period. The undergarment she wears extends upto foot having a single knot at the centre of the hip with a tussle hanging upto the knee. The foot portion is broken.

One lady attendant is seen standing on either side. The at-tendant who stands by her right side carries a box on her head with a cushion in between her head and the box probably sym-bolizing the wealth. The attendant on her left is also in standing position bearing a pot on her head. She also has an omamented cushion below the pot, which may represent the auspicious object of Kumbha. These attendants are also having only two hands each. The right hands of both the figures appear to be in dispro-portionate length while left hands are shown as if they are sup-porting the objects that are on their heads. All other features of them are quite in consonance with the main figure Yakshi. The right side attendant is little taller than the left one.

This Yakshi sculpture is unique as far as Tamilnadu is con-cerned as this is the earliest among Yakshi figures so far noticed. It is assignable to 3rd 4th centuries A.D. This date has been assigned by comparing the characteristic features of Amarawati Yakshi figure which is dated to 2nd century B.C.

The Yakshi workship appears to have been quite familiar in Tamilnadu from post Cankam age as we have reference to Yakshi as Punkan lyakki (ie. yakshi who has flower like eyes) in a Tamil literature Cilappatikaram2 which is assignable to 1 to 3rd centuries A.D.

The find spot of this Yakshi is also significant as Kadaimalaipputtur is not far off from Kanchipuram where a fa-mous Jain centre Paruttikkunru was in existence during post Christian era. An authentic reference to this effect comes from a copper charter known as Pallankoil copper plates of Simhavarama Pallava period.3 It was issued in his 6th regnal year i.e., 556 A.D. Anandamangalam about 10 km west of Kadaimalaipputtur was also another flourishing Jain centre in 10th Century A.D. Jinagirippalle4 was the name of this centre. Hence it is apparent that Kadaimalaipputtur and its surroundings should have nur-tured Jainism from very early period i.e., atleast from 3rd century A.D. onwards.

II. OTHER JAIN SCULPTURES

Stone image known as Abhinandana, the fourth Tirthankara has been located at Kurumpundi in Kandarva Kottai Taluk of Pudukkottai District.5 He is seated in Ardhapariyanka asana. The MUKKUTAI (Tripple umbrella) and the PRIYALA TREE are seen above the head. On either side one Yaksha is holding a Chamara. A lady holding flower in her hand and the figures of monkeys are carved on the pedestal. This kind of figure is rarely available in Tamil Nadu and it is datable to 8th-9th century AD

Stone image of Mahavira and a Tirthankara were discov-ered from Vadugappatti in Madurai District.6 On the side of the Tirthankara image an inscription in Vatteluttu character is en-graved. Both the image and the epigraph are contemporary and assignable to 10th 11th century A.D. This image is about 412 feet high and 1½ feet width. The inscription refers to the recla-mation of the village Mananilainallur alias Malaikulam. It is known from this inscription that this village was one of the famous Jain centres and the merchant community Ticai Yayirattu Ainnurruvar had lived in it employing a security force known as Attanikal the probable equivalent Tamil term for Attikocam, the Sanskrit word. Hence it is evident that this Mahavir image was worshipped by the above merchant community.

More than 900 years old Mahavira sculpture carved on a stone slab which is about 120 cm high and 60 cm, width had been found at Iralachen near Kaverippakkam, in Arakkonam Taluk of Vellore District.7 Mahavira is seated on a lotus pedestal in dyana pose keeping his hands crossed on his lap. His head is seen in a half circle prabha. Mukkutai (Tripple umbrella), scroll decoration above his head and the Siras Chakra behind his head are also seen. He is flanked by Yaksha on either side. At the feet of them Makaras are sculptured along with three lions in seated posture on the front side of the pedestal. This image is datable to 11th century A.D. on stylistical ground.

A mutilated sculpture of Mahavira was discovered from Amarapuram, just one kilometer away from Iralacheri of the same Vellore District.8 The face of this image is damaged. He is also in şeated posture keeping his hands crossed and kept on his lap. As usual Yaksha is standing on either side of him. The head portion of the Yakshas are also damaged.

A sculpture of Mahavira assignable to 12th century A.D. seated on a pita which bears the figure of lion, is partly damaged on its face. This image has been accidentally unearthed while sand was dug for transporting, in river bed of Aditangal a hamlet

Of the Village Alandur in Thirunravur Taluk of Tiruvallur Dis-trict.9 It is believed that the name Aditangal of this hamlet could have been named after Adikalar, i.e., Tirthankarar.

An exciting seated Tirthankara Sculpture has been spotted by the Tamilnadu Archaeological Research Institute at Nerkunram about 8 km south east of Tozhuppedu in Kanchipuram District.10 It seated in yogasana position placing the legs crossed one over the other. In the same way the hands are also kept. The eyes are almost closed suggesting that he is in deep dyana Tirtankara is found flanked by an Yaksha on either side. It also appears that there are four more figures apparently ladies standing two on each side. The lady figures that are by the side of his right thigh are more visible than those that stand in oppo-site side. Hence

there are six human figures in total apart from two Gandharvas who are seen seated above his head on either side of triple umbrella. The flamed prabha around his head adds beauty to his calm and serene face. This sculpture is datable to 8-9th century A.D.

III. INSCRIBED TIRTHANKARA IMAGE

An inscribed stone image of Tirthankara of Rajaraja – 1 period had been located at Pandalkudi.11 Pandalkudi is situated on the highway leading to Ettayapuram from Aruppukkottai. This Jain image is found on the outskirts of a Vinayaka temple which is a newly built one. This image is said to have been brought to this place recently as the banyan tree under which it was originally installed, had broken and fallen on this image. It is further said that originally there should have been a small Jain temple as the remnants of which are still seen there.

This figure is seated in ardhabhariyankasana on a pedestal which is carved with two lion motif in standing posture. Cusion at the back of this figure and the hallow of light around his head are also seen. The typical triple umbrella is found above his head Chauri bearers are also carved on either side. On the front and sides of the pitam the inscription in typical Chola character is engraved in seven lines. It is written in 22nd regnal year of Rajaraja the great who ruled from 985 to 1014 A.D. It refers to the gift of the image to the Jain Palli of Nallur of Vembunadu by an indi. vidual Pugalsadaiyan in memory of his grandfather and grand. mother.

IV. INSCRIBED BRONZE IMAGE

An inscribed Dharmadevi bronze image at Appandainathar temple (Jain temple) of Tirunarungondai, a village in Ulundurpet Taluk of Villapuram District was identified recently.12 The exist ence of the engraving on the pedestal of this image was brought to the notice of this author by Thiru M. Chandramurthy, Regis-tering Officer of the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeol-ogy and was deciphered by both of them.

The inscription is in four lines of the typical Chola character assignable to 12th-13th century A.D. and it reads as follows:

1.Svasti Sri Tirunarunkontaikkup porrama (rai) terkirKovilillirunta.

2.(a) Kshan Patukkum Itupata Ippon arai Ip-porul Kotuttumittu ivarukku

3.(ai) laip Putitakac ceivittan carakipalatevi it tarmam ivaru Kurukkal Sri Bha

4. la Tevarkkum Utanpatu ivar Tampi (Narayan) Accanupayam

The inscription referes to a gift of new bronze image of (Chragibaladevi) to Tirunarunkontai temple which was situated south of Porramarai tank by the priest Baladevar and his brother (Narayan) Achchan.

The image which bears the engravings is now known as Dharmadevi and is datable to the same period of the inscription. It is one among of more than twenty-five bronze images housed in the grilled chamber of the Mukhamantapa of Appandainathar temple. Of the above images three bearing engravings have al-ready been noticed. But the current engraving which is on the pedestal of Dharmadevi has so far not been noticed. Hence it assumes importance. This and the earlier engravings are the authentic records for identifying the image, its date and the donar who made these offerings.

This Dharmadevi is standing in three bhanga posture on the padmapita over a patrapita. It has two hands being one in Katakamutra while the other in lola hasta. The karanta maguta which adorn her head is found with a seated Tirthankara flanked by Makara head.

On the right side of this Devi there are three figures two on the right and one on the left. Of the two on the right, one is left with feet only while the other appears to be a child. The left side figure is a lady carrying a pot on her right hand. Her left hand is shown as lola hasta. The height of Dharmadevi bronze image is about 80 cm and the width between the two shoulders is about 16½ cm.

V. VOTIVE TERRACOTTA PLAQUES

The Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology has located a few remarkable votive terracotta plaques datable to nearly 2000 years old bearing the engravings in Archaic Tamil and Ashokan Brahmi Characters in possession of a Vidwan I.Ramaswamy of Poluvampatti in Coimbatore District.13 More-over a considerable number of terracotta figurines also have been found having the inscriptions written in the same combined script either on the base or at the top of the images. Thiru I. Ramaswamy, an octogenarian Tamil scholar has informed about these collec-tion to the Curator of Coimbatore, Thiru R. Poongundran and requested him to examine them personally and publish it for the benefit of the public. Immediately, Thiru Poongundran visited his house and examined these plaques and figures and sent a detailed report to the author of this book.

In turn, the author rushed to Poluvampatti along with Poongundran and made arrangements to take photographs of these objects. With the help of these photographs, we were able to decipher a few sentences here and there in each plaques. To get the readings confirmed and clarified, this author approached the veteran Scholar I. Mahadevan for his

comments and improve-ment. He readily responded to the request of this author and took pains to decipher more sentences and sent back the revised and improved reading to him.

The entire collection of this finding include three terracotta plaques and about 20 terracotta figurines besides a copper piece engraved with a male figure probably a chieftain and his name KADAN written in archaic Tamil script. It is presumed that these terracotta plaques and figurines could have been presented as votive offerings to a local temple. When asked about the prov-enance of these plaques and figurines, Thiru. I. Ramaswamy informed that these were brought from Perur a suburban of the city of Comibatore and added that these have been collected when the diggings where made for the foundation of new house

Conclusion

The practice of offering votive objects like terracotta plaques and figurines were in vogue in North India.14As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, this tradition of offering votive plaques has not so far been met with. But offering the wooden cradle with the figure of a child for getting pregrant and installation of terracotta figures of horses, elephants, and dogs in front of Ayyanar and Vediappan temples were prevalent from Pallava period i.e., from 6th-7th century A.D. Hence, these terracotta plaques and figu-rines assume great significance and serve a valuable source material for understanding the religious evolution in Tamilnadu.

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