

HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE OF TIRTHANKARAS IN TAMILNADU WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KALUGUMALAI

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Abstract: *The word **Jina** is a Sanskrit word meaning “Conqueror” is a title attached to the revered beings, which are said to have controlled their passions and have obtained perfect knowledge and freed themselves from the bondage of Karma. Their preaching’s and principles are popularly known as “Jainism”. On the other hand, there is a clear evidence of the movements of the Jains from Karnataka to the Kongu region, (Salem, Erode and Coimbatore areas) the western fringes of the Kaveri Delta (Tiruchirapalli) southwards into Pudukottai region (Sittannavasal) and finally into the Pandya kingdom (Madurai, Ramanathapuram and UK Kingdom Tinnelvely Districts). Though the Jains seem to have colonized and permanently settled in the extreme South of India, probably due to the conducive natural atmosphere i.e., in and around the hills. They had their traces in places like Vijayamangalam, Thingalur, Dharma puri, 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.*

Key Words: Tirthankaras, Jina, trichatra, Tondaimandalam, Vatteluttu Inscriptions

1. INTRODUCTION:

An attempt has been made to bring out the historical significance of Tirthankaras in Tamil Nadu with special reference to Kalugumalai. This study is based upon the primary and secondary sources with analytic approach. The word **Jina** is a Sanskrit word meaning “Conqueror” is a title attached to the revered beings, which are said to have controlled their passions and have obtained perfect knowledge and freed themselves from the bondage of Karma. Their preaching’s and principles are popularly known as “Jainism”. Their followers were known as Jains or **Nirgrantha**. But the period of origin of Jainism is shrouded in mystery. Anyhow it began to attain the place of monastic idealism from sixth century B.C. onwards. In this context it should be noted that there were **24 Tirthankaras** commencing from Rishabha and ending with **Vardhamana Mahavira**. Among them the last two i.e., Parakanatha and Mahavira alone are treated as historical beings. Even though there was a gap of two and a half centuries between the periods of the last two, the fortunes of Jainism during that interval had grown and that seems to have been a living religion. But due to 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, Jainism gained an opportunity to find new avenues in the peninsular India. From there it should have immigrated to the further South. On the other hand, there is a clear evidence of the movements of the Jains from Karnataka to the Kongu region, (Salem, Erode and Coimbatore areas) the western fringes of the Kaveri Delta (Tiruchirapalli) southwards into Pudukottai region (Sittannavasal) and finally into the Pandya kingdom (Madurai, Ramanathapuram and UK Kingdom Tinnelvely Districts). Though the Jains seem to have colonized and permanently settled in the extreme South of India, probably due to the conducive natural atmosphere i.e., in and around the hills. They had their traces in places like Vijayamangalam, Thingalur, Dharma puri, 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.

1.1. OBJECTIVES:

- To study the origin of Jainism and its spread to other parts of Tamil Nadu.
- To explain the early history of **Tirthankaras** of Jainism.
- To identify the followers of Jainism and their images carved out from the hill in various places.
- To enumerate the artistic skill of the sculptures of Jains in Kalugumalai hill rocks.
- To study the Disposition of **Tirthankaras** images in Jainism.

1.2. The Sangam Pandyas and Jainism:

The Pandyas of the Sangam age were liberal in their religious outlook and therefore, all religions including Jainism flourished during their rule also. This is evident from **Maduraikkanchi** and **Silappadikaram** referring to the existence of Jaina monasteries (caves) at the outskirts of Madurai. The **Silappadikaram** also mentions a shrine of a **yakshi** worshipped by the cowherdess Madari at Madurai. Moreover, most of the early Jaina caves, already referred to, continued to throb with religious activities under the Pandyas. Curiously the enough, Kadalan Valuti, an officer of early Pandya king **Nedunjeliyan** dedicated a monastery (cave) to the reputed monk Kaninanda at Mankulam. The king's co-brother and nephew made suitable for habitation another cave and commissioned stone beds in it for the sake of Kaninanda and his disciples. Although king **Nedunjeliyan** had not made any specific benefaction, his family members and one of his officials took keen interest in the monastic establishments at Mankulam. The role of other Pandya kings and their close relatives in supporting the Jaina creed does not find place either in literature or in lithic records. In this process of assimilation, Jainism paid much importance to idolatory and admitted ritualistic worship of Tirthankaras and their attendant deities. Sometimes, prominence was given to the worship of **yakshis** like **Ambika** and **Padmavati**. The early ascetic-abodes which lost importance in the wake of bhakti movement began to bristle with Jaina activities once again and came to possess exquisite bold reliefs of **Tirthankaras** and yakshis, to which regular ritualistic worship was performed. Jaina caverns at Anamalai, Alagarmalai, Tirupparankunram, Uttamapalayam, Kilakuyilkudi, Aivarmalai and Kalugumalai, Chitalar in the Pandya region are some of the examples bearing testimony to this new development.

Moreover, renowned monks like Ajjanandi, Vajranandi, Uttanandi, Gunasagaradeva, Santisena and a host of others played a dominant role in popularizing their religion and accelerating its growth. Although changes were accepted in the mode of worship, their doctrines remained the same without modification. Jainism, thus, became stronger than before, and hence, it could easily counterbalance the growth of brahmanical religion. This new trend of Jainism coincided with the early Pandya rule in southern Tamilnadu.

1.3. Tirthankaras Images in Tamil Nadu:

In Jainism, **Tirthankara** is a human who attains liberation or enlightenment and then becomes a role model and teacher for those seeking spiritual guidance. Jains believe that exactly 24 Tirthankaras lived in our part of the Universe till date and the next is expected to be born 81,500 years from now. The first **Tirthankara Rishabanatha** is mentioned in the Vishnu and **Bhagavata Puranas** as belonging to a very remote past. The earliest Brahmanic literature makes reference to a sect which defies the Vedas and opposed animal sacrifices. The Yajurveda refers the names of three Tirthankaras Rishabha, Ajitha and Aristhanemi. The Jains claim that Neminatha, their 22nd Tirthankara was a contemporary of Lord Krishna and belonged to the Yadava family. Parasvanatha, the 23rd Tirthankara is the earliest Jain leader who can be reliably dated as born in 877 BC and lived for 100 years. The last Tirthankara, Mahavira was born in 599 B.C and lived for 72 years. I found an interesting sequence in the the number of years that each Tirthankara is believed to have lived. Rishabanatha is believed to have lived 592.704 x 1018 years. The number of years that subsequent Tirthankaras lived diminished and finally we have Mahavira who lived for 72 years.

1.4. Adinatha:

Adinatha alias Rishabhanatha, the first and foremost Tirthankara, was born to Nabiraja and Marudevi, the king and queen respectively of Ayodhya. When he grew into a handsome youth, he was married to Yashaswati and Sunanda, the sisters of princes Kachcha and Mahakachcha. Later, Adinatha was coronated as king on the throne of Ayodhya and thereafter, Nabhiraja retired from the active concerns of kingdom. One day, when the court dancer Nilanjana displayed her skill in the art of dancing, unexpectedly, she fell down and breathed her last. Consequently, realising the ephemeral nature of mundane life, Adinatha took to asceticism. After performing severe austerities for a long time, he got enlightenment. Finally, he attained parinirvana on the summit of Ashtapada or Kailasa mountain. The worship of Adinath could have taken roots in Tamilnadu coeval with the spread of Jainism a few centuries before the advent of Christian era, but contemporary evidence to corroborate the prevalence of his worship is conspicuously absent. The mention of "**Adibhagavan**" in the invocatory couplet of Tiruvalluvars Tirukkural, the foremost did active work of the 1st century A. D., is taken to be synonymous with the name, Adinatha, of the first Jina. He is said to be the primordial one just as the vowel "A is the first of all aksharas." The jaina epic **Silappadikaram** of the 3rd century A. D., describes an image of the Tirthankara who came into existence first and attained kevalagnana. Accordingly, it was shown seated under the shade of a tree (Pindi) with a prabhamandala around its head and triple umbrella above. Even though the Jina is not referred to by his proper name in this context, unmistakably, it stands for Adinath's image only. However, it could have been either a stucco or a wooden figure only, as stone was not preferred for image of deities by the Tamils till about the 6th century A. D. The above description, evidently, reveals the knowledge of the iconography of Tirthankaras as early as 3rd century A. D. But the earliest extant image of Jaina in Tamilnadu is datable to the 7th century only. Natural caverns resorted to by Jaina recluses between 3rd century B.C. and 6th century A. D.

were not embellished with figure of Tirthankaras, as iconic worship received little importance during the early period. Moreover, aversion for the use of stone for making icons of deities also prevented the early Tamils from encouraging stone sculptural art till the 6th century A. D.

Jainism received a temporary setback in the 7th century A. D., consequent to the rapid growth of Saivism and Vaisnavism fostered through the bhakti movement. Ruling classes' support to large scale building of brahmanical temples also affected Jainism to a considerable extent. However, soon it recovered from reverse and tried to counterbalance the growth of brahmanical religion by adjusting itself to the changing circumstances. As its sequel, anthropomorphic worship of Tirthankaras and their attendants formed an integral part of Jainism. This change could be seen from the early bald cave shelters metamorphosing into veritable museums of sculptures since the 8th century A. D. Image of Rishabhanatha have been reported from many such cave temples which once again began to bristle with religious activities. In some places, his sculptures are represented alone, while in others he is accompanied by one or more Tirthankaras images. Therefore, for the convenience of the scholar study, they are classified into single sculptures and figures in a group of two, three, four and five. Single representations of a Tirthankara are commonly found in several Jaina caves throughout Tamilnadu. But most of their identity remains uncertain as they do not contain lanchanas. However, in some places local traditions, epigraphical corroborations and circumstantial evidence come to the rescue. The cave temple at Tiruppanmalai near Arcot contains a diminutive relief of Adinatha, carved above the entrance. It is shown seated in **dhyana** posture, surmounted by a **trichatra** and flanked by chauris on either side. This simple image, exhibiting the 8th century Pallava idiom, was known as "Tiruppanamalaidevar" i.e., lord of milky-white mountain. In conformity with the **puranic** tradition of Rishabhathatha attaining nirvana on mount Kailasa, here, the image is elegantly styled as "Tiruppanamalai devar. "Lataraja, a local chieftain, allotted some taxes collected from Kuranganpadi village for conducting worship to his image.

A number of Jaina caverns around Madurai gained a fresh lease of life in the 9th century A. D. due to the ceaseless efforts of renowned monks like Ajjanandi, Gunasena, Kanaganandi, Kanagavira, Gunasagara and others. As a result, the earlier bare caverns were provided with beautiful icons of Jaina deities. The Arittapatti cavern has a fine carving of Tirthankara within a semi-circular niche, shown seated on a raised lotus pedestal in **ardhapadmasana**, flanked by two lamps and canopied by a triple umbrella in diminishing tiers with a finial atop. Its tall and slender body, tonsured head, receding forehead, half-closed eyes and calm countenance portray the typical 9th century Pandya style. This exquisite specimen was caused to be made at the instance of the revered Ajjanandi. Sravakas of the near by Vaniyakkudi village agreed to protect this image by making provision for its worship. The clue for its identification with Adinatha lies in the name of the hillock, on which the image is carved. It is epigraphically referred to as 'Tiruppinaiyan malai, which means the hillock of that **Tirthankara** who emerged as a Saviour in order to rescue humanity when Bhogabhumi lost all its charm and wealth. Obviously, Adinath is indirectly-alluded to in this attributive epithet 'Tiruppinaiyan. Similar single sculptures commissioned by Ajjanandi find place at Alagarmalai, Kongarpuliyankulam and Karunkalakkudi, all within a radius of 20 kms, from Madurai. Their identity with Adinath is not improbable as they had also been consecrated by Ajjanandi. Kilavalavu, about 40 kms from Madurai, also has a fine image of a Tirthankara, locally believed to represent Adinatha. It is seated on a lotus pedestal in **dhyana** and surmounted by a curvilinear chatra in diminishing tiers. Two lamps and two **chamras** flank the Jina on either side. This sculpture was commissioned by one Sankaran Srivallabha who also made some endowments for daily offerings to the image and for a lamp to be lighted in front of it. An excellent portrayal of Adinatha in **ardhapadmasana** and flanked by flywhisk bearers adorns the huge asectic resort at Valutalangunam, near Tiruvannamalai. It has a sturdy body, calm countenance, half closed eyes, descending earlobes etc., exhibiting the 9th century style. It was known as 'Marutupirasurai devar' i.e. the deva born to Marudevi, thus, its identity with Adinatha is resolved. Some more Jina caverns which served as places of worship as well as abodes of monks contain sculptures of a Tirthankara carved alone, but their identification remains uncertain for want of supportive evidence.

1.5. Adinatha with Mahavira:

Adinatha with Mahavira, the first and last **Tirthankaras** together instead of all the twenty four in a single composition. Non-availability of space to carve the entire group at one place could have prompted, initially, craftsmen to represent only Adinatha and Mahavira. Finally, it became an accepted norm symbolizing the chaturvimsatimurtis in sculptural art. The earliest sculpture of Adinath with Mahavira comes from Karuppankunru hillock, near Madurantakam. Seated in **Ardhapadmasana**, it possesses a slender body and flexible limbs. Two chauri bearers gracefully stand in adoration on either side. Being the earliest attempt to show Adinatha with Mahavira, the sculptor had unintentionally left a gap of twelve feet between them, and this mode of depiction does recur in later times. These images exhibit the 8th century Pallava style of art. Eruvadi in Tirunelveli district has an interesting example of 'twin' sculptures. On the eastern face of the twin hillock (irattai porrai) here are carved more or less identical reliefs of Adinatha and Mahavira, each with a triple umbrella. Other accessory figures are omitted in this panel. These images, commissioned by Ajjanandi in the 9th century A. D., were taken care of by the members of the local assembly who agreed to make necessary arrangement for the conduct of their worship. Ajjanandi's choice of the twin hillock to carve

the two Tirthankaras is praise worthy, and it was apparently more prompted by intent and less by chance. Perhaps, Ajjananci visualised the twin hillock as symbolic forms of Adinatha and Mahavira.

Melapparaipatti, near Koilpatti town, has two bold reliefs of Adinatha and Mahavira, seated alike in **dhyana** and surmounted by a **trichatra** each. Other accessory motifs, as at Eruvadi, do not find place in this panel. Owing to the fragile nature of the rock, these 9th century figures are badly worn out. Aluruttimalai, near Pudukkottai, also contains two medium-size reliefs of Adinatha and Mahavira carved on the overhanging boulder of a cave. Iconographically and stylistically, they are similar to those examples from Eruvadi and Melapparaipatti. Jina caves at Muttupatti, Uttamapalayam and Kilavalavu in Madurai district also have 9th century sculptures of the two Tirthankaras together. Among them, the Muttupatti specimens are remarkable for their elegance and refinement. Adinath, majestically seated on a pedestal with contemplative calmness of the face, it accommodated with in a curvilinear-topped niche, while Mahavira in a rectangular one. The former was caused to be sculpted by the monk Manakaviraperiyadigal and the latter by Maganandi acharya. At Uttamapalayam, two miniature figures representing the first and last Jinas are carved in specially cut semicircular niches. A more or less similar sculptural group, having Mahavira by the side of Adinath is met with at Kilavalavu near Melur. But the shape of the niches differs from one another, probably to facilitate correct identity of the two Jinas. The first image was sculpted at the instance of Lokabhanuattaraka and the next by Srikatti, a lay devotee.

1.6. Adinatha In A Group Of Three:

Rock-cut sculptures of Adinatha shown in a group of three Tirthankaras are found at Sittanavasal, Siyamangalam Kilavalavu and Kalugumalai. In this category, images at the flanks are invariably Adinatha and Mahavira, while the middle one may represent anyone of the other Jainas. The central one's identification largely depends upon local tradition and popular belief. The famous Sittanavasal rock-cut temple near Pudukkottai contains in its shrine a row of three seated figures, clumsy in appearance, with a flat trichatra crowning their heads. No other decorative feature is seen in this group. Iconographically, Adinatha, the others. On stylistic grounds, it is assigned to the 9th century A. D. Among the panoramic array of sculptured panels adorning the Kalugumalai ascetic- abode, a group of three images representing Adinath, Neminatha and Mahavira deserves special mention. The first curvilinear niche accommodates Adinatha seated in **ardhapadmaasana** pose on a **simhasana**, flanked by fly-whisk bearers gratefully leaning in adoration towards the Jina. The simple curls of his hair, smiling countenance, half-closed eyes, melting contour of his body and attenuated hip add charm and life to this 9th century masterpiece. A **trichatra** in diminishing tiers crowns his head. The register above the triple umbrella is exuberantly decorated with creeper designs in the form of circles having miniature **gandharvas** playing musical instruments and celestial damsels rhythmically dancing in accordance to their tune. Further above are Surya, Chandra, horse riders, yali riders, a snake and the celestial elephant Iravata. The elephant, emerging from the background, is beautifully portrayed with its trunk rolled, ears winnowing and head turned in semi-profile, as if listening to the exposition of Adinatha. It is note worthy that a **dharmachakra**, the emblem of Jain **Dharma** is carved on its pedestal, which also helps to confirm his identity. In modern period also images representing three Tirthankaras in a group have been cast in metal and donated to temples as votive offerings, but generally they are depicting three Chakravarty Teerthankaras Shantinath, Kunthunath and Arahath.

1.7. Adinatha in A Group Of Four:

The rock adjacent to the main cave at Tirumalai, near Arani, contains four sculptures depicting Ambika, Bahubali, Adinatha and Parsvadeva. In this panel, Adinatha occupies the third place and Mahavira is replaced by Parsva. Besides, except Adinatha, other are shown standing. Sinnavai, a royal lady, is said to have gifted a lamp to the perpetually lit before these images. An isolated huge boulder at the foot hill of Tirakkol, North West of Vandavasi, has carvings of four Jinas on its four sides. Adinatha, among them, occupies the eastern side as in the case of most of his sculptures. He is shown majestically seated in meditative pose with a circular halo behind and a **trichatra** above the head. Two flying Vidyadharas offer worship to him at the top level.

1.8. Adinatha in a Group of Five:

Rock-cut specimens of Adinath in a group of five images find place at Chittampur and Chettipodavu. The Malainatha temple at Chittampur, near Tindivanam, has a boulder containing image of Bahubali, Parsva, Adinatha, Mahavira and Ambika yakshi, sculpted during the reign of Adityachola I (871-907 A. D). Although, Adinatha occupies the third place, the tradition of sculpting him by the side Mahavira is maintained here. The Jina is portrayed with a muscular body, smiling countenance and long limbs gently placed one over the other. The circular halo, triple umbrella and creeper design are typical of the 9th century style. Inside a cave at Chettipodavu, near Madurai, is seen a row of thin relief's depicting Ambika, Adinatha, Neminatha, Mahavira and another yakshi arranged in the same alignment. Iconographically, the Tirthankara are shown similar, except Mahavira having a horizontal contour of

shoulders. These specimens, seated in yogic posture, were caused to be made by the monk Gunasenapperiyadigal in the 9th century A.D.

1.9. Tirthankara at Kalugumalai:

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 being made to note down the features of the Jain sculptures of Kalugumalai. Kalugumalai is a rich abode of historical monuments mainly the Jain sculptures with Vatteluthu Inscriptions. It is situated in the V.O.Chimdambam District of Kovilpatti Division, 21 kilometers from Kovilpatti and 20 kilometres from Sankarankovil of Tirunelveli District. This city is called by different names such as Tenpalani, Kalukasalam, Uvanagiri, Kajamuhaparvatham, SampothiKshetram, all these names are assigned on the basis of some legendary stories. The unique feature of this place contains a lot of Jain relics along with inscriptions pertaining to the Northern side of the hill testifies the Jain influence.

2. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

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 prominent 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 at the age Palaeographic ally the Vatteluttu scripts are datable to the 8th century A.D. 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 available even today at different places like Samanarmalai, Muttupatti, Tirupparankunram and Kongarpuliyankulam. To worsen the situation in a part of this cavern Ayyanar temple built at a later date stands concealing the figures of the Jain monks. With regard to the sculptures 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 regard the practice of worshipping images of their Tirtankaras as coeval with the foundation of their creeds. But here at Kalugumalai 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 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. The figures available here are besides the Thirtankaras in the uniform seated posture, Mukkudainathar, Parasunatha, Komundeeswarar and Padmavati. The figures are all alive is appearance. From the inscriptions available at the bottom of the statues 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 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 of their basic tenet of avoidance of desire by the Jain monks.

From the inscriptions under many of the Tirurnenis or Padimams or Perams (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 Kalaivur has dedicated a statue in the name of his father Kavithi Devan. Pondangnalan hailed from the local area i.e. Tirune churam 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 chisled a statue for his son Sendan Setti. Milalur Kurathiyar has engraved to two statues, i.e. one for siranqikkuavadigal and another one for Gunanandhippariyar in memory of their visits. A Manakkier (student) in memory of his teacher Tirumalai. Arattanemi Padarar has dedicated a statue. Two statues for the merit of Tirunechurathu Konlan Tamavanar and Puravinvelan were donated by their relative Paramanattan. In memory of Kottunattu Perumbarrur Udhan Kaman a local Kurathi has executed a statue. Sendangudiyar 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 to out two statues. 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.

3. DISPOSITION OF TIRTHANKARA IMAGES:

Canonical texts on Hindu sculptures have laid down rules as to which side or direction images of deities should be installed in temples. These rules are strictly adhered to in Saiva and Vaishnava temples even at present. But

such a tradition has not been followed in Jaina temples. However, some rock-cut images of Adinatha 72 are carved east-facing, Mahavira south-facing and Parsvanatha west-facing. Such specimens are met with in places like Kalugumalai, Chettipodavu, Anaimalai, Tirakkol, Vallimalai and Tirunarungondai. Whether these sculptures were intentionally commissioned so or merely a coincidence cannot be precisely ascertained at present. During the medieval times, however, there was a strong belief associating Parsvanatha with the western direction among the Digambaras of Tamilnadu. As it sequel, many of his images came to be consecrated facing the western direction. Being a Jina occupying the western niche, Parsvanatha was popularly known as “**Tirumerrisaiyan**” or “**Tirumerrisai perumal**”. Although this tradition was in vogue in Tamilnadu, most of the Parsvanatha temples face east and they even do not accommodate his image in the western niche of the shrine. Hence, it cannot be treated as a rule that Parsvanatha should be consecrated facing the western direction only. Incidentally, it may be added here that in most of the Parsvanatha sculptures, his head is canopied by a five-hooded serpent only, unlike their counterparts in Andhra and Karnataka where seven hoods are commonly seen.

4. CONCLUSION:

Jainism is an Indian religion that prescribes a path of non-violence towards all living beings and its philosophy and practice emphasize the necessity of self-effort to move the soul towards divine consciousness and liberation. 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 devotionals 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.

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