

“Thrikkaṇamathilakam” As A Jain Centre

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Abstract

Mathilakam played an important role in the development of the Jain tradition in Kerala. It is considered in the Saṅgam period, Thrikkaṇamathilakam was a famous Jain centre during the Chēra dynasty rule. There is a popular opinion that Mathilakam as ancient Kuṇavayir kōttam, Thrikkaṇamathilakam or Thirukkuṇāvai, the place where Iḷaṅgo Adigaḷ composed his epic Cilppadikāram. This paper is an attempt to shed fresh light on the unexplored corners of the history of Thrikkaṇamathilakam as a Jain centre. There are various inscriptions mentioned about Kuṇavayir kōttam, Thrikkaṇamathilakam, or Thirukkuṇāvai. This inscriptional analysis can be termed as a landmark in the history of Jainism in Kerala. Fragmentary inscriptions from Mathilakam, which have been read with the help of an epigraphist, can be marked as an original contribution to this study. In this paper, the author included all the inscriptions chronologically related to the region. On the other side, this study is an answer to the question, i.e., “what was the contribution of Chēra to Thrikkaṇamathilakam?”, “what was the reason behind the decline of Thrikkaṇamathilakam?” etc. This research is interdisciplinary in many aspects and focuses on the closer look and scientific documentation of Mathilakam based on historical, archaeological, inscriptional and literature aspects.

Keywords: Jainism, Thrikkaṇamathilakam, Inscriptions, Chēra, Saṅgam.

Introduction

History lies deep within the villages of India, which is unfortunately, often forgotten. Mathilakam is an obvious name in that long list. There is a popular notion that the Thrikkaṇamathilakam aka present day Mathilakam, N 10° 17' 28.29" E 076° 10' 12.06" (Northern region of Kodungallur), 19km North from Paṭṭaṇam was an important Jain Centre. One version is that Iḷaṅgo Aḍigaḷ wrote Cilppadikāram from Thrikkaṇamathilakam. However, this is not yet scientifically proven. Still, the pieces of evidence from there, such as rectangular wells and other objects collected from the pond raise the question of Jain tradition. There are memories among the local people about objects being recovered from this pond. The Mathilakam is described as Thrikkaṇamathilakam in 14th-century works, as a walled town having a larger temple structure within it. Several laterite walls exposed in earlier archaeological explorations are yet to be chronologically identified. The occurrence in the lower half of the deposit of sturdy redware, Chinese celadon ware, and Chōḷa coins dated the site to the 10th -11th century CE (Cherian, 2014). The coins have familiar Chōḷa characteristics, i.e., standing king on the one side and seated goddess on the other. The surface survey in the Mathilakam area by teachers and students of the archaeology course at UC College, Aluva in 1996 revealed few Iron Age burials. Apart from this, there were some sites identified in the Northern region of modern Kodungallur such as Agasthyapuram, Chakkarapadam, Chentrappinni, Mathilakam, Perinjanam, etc. These sites were reported with urn burials (Cherian, 2016). The latest development of the fragmentary inscription from Mathilakam again raises the question of the Jain settlement. On this aspect, it is important to look with a multi-disciplinary approach. Thus, the work "Thrikkaṇamathilakam as a Jain centre" focuses on the closer look and scientific documentation based on historical, archaeological, inscriptional, and literature aspects.

Review of Literature and Methods

Several scholars have examined the religious beliefs of the people of Kerala. Many of them pointed out that groups of people followed the religions of Jainism, and

Buddhism in Kerala. Their remarks were often very casual and few of them had come to definite conclusions based on authoritative evidence. This study is a critical survey of earlier works intended to examine their views on Jainism, points out the strength and weakness of arguments, and reassess them for a precise understanding of the subject based on concrete evidence.

Historians argued that there was a wide gap of sources between the post-Saṅgam period. Up to the 8th century or in a conventional view, it was a dark age in the history of Kerala. The noted historian Kesavan Veluthat (1976: 183.) considered this period as an era of Brahminical influence. Scholars like Champakalakshmi, (1996: 101) by analysing the Saṅgam anthologies, and Iravatham Mahadevan (2003: 129) by examining the Brāhmī inscriptions of the period stated that during the time of Saṅgam literature there was a spread of both Jainism and Buddhism in the ancient Tamiḷakam. We can notice that Kerala was a part of Tamiḷakam at the same time. But the scholars of Kerala not worked much in this area and wrote only from the Brahmin influx or with Keraḷolpathy and Parasurāma legend.

There are several works published about Jainism in Kerala. The works of M.S, Dhiraj (2020: 52-59), (2018: 487-504) have been focussed on the Jain tradition of Kerala. Apart from this, there are works by Manoj T.R(2008: 73-91) and Padmakumari Amma (1995: 99-158) which talk about various Jain centres across Kerala. However, these works didn't refer to Mathilakam specifically in detail.

Mathilakam was an important Jain centre in Kerala. But it doesn't get the recognition it deserves. The difficulty in obtaining evidence is the main obstacle in conducting such a study. The recent explorations, excavations, and findings from this region are adequate to prove its importance as a Jain centre. This research is interdisciplinary in many aspects and focuses on the closer look and scientific documentation of Mathilakam.

Results and Discussion

Mathilakam played an important role in the Jain history of Kerala. It is considered in the Saṅgam period, Thrikkāṇa mathilakam was a famous Jain centre during the Chēra dynasty rule. There is a popular opinion that Mathilakam as ancient Kuṇavayīrkōttam, Thrikkāṇamathilakam *or* Thirukkuṇāvai, is the place where Iḷaṅgo Aḍigaḷ composed his epic Cilppadikāram (Narayanan, 1972: 17-22). It is commonly believed that most of the present-day Hindu temples were once a Jain centre. Jains came to South India, during the period of Chandragupta Maurya and migrated to Śravaṇabelagoḷa from Magadha. Jains of ancient Tamiḷakam were the successors of them. They had a significant role in trade activities.

Chēra ruled the ancient Tamiḷakam and the regions related to Kerala. History points out the presence of two Chēra dynasties, i.e., ancient and medieval Chēra. Inscriptional evidence indicates both Chēra have the same family lineage (Dhiraj, 2019: 58-69). Most of the ancient Chēra rulers were either Jains or patrons of Jainism. Several ancient Tamiḷ-Brāhmī inscriptions have been found from the ancient Tamiḷakam. These inscriptions bearing the suffix ‘ātaṇ’ indicates the patronage of Jainism in Chēra. The inscriptions bearing ‘ātaṇ’, mostly found from the Jain caves or the regions are directly or indirectly related to Jainism. It can assume that the suffix ‘ātaṇ’ related with most Chēra king’s name found in Tamiḷ-Brāhmī inscriptions as well as in the literary sources have a Jain affiliation (Dhiraj, 2018: 487-504). The book titled ‘Early Tamil Epigraphy’ by Iravatham Mahadevan (2003:12-13, 36, 40, 46, 56, 61-62, 70, 74, 82: 334-335, 369, 373, 381, 395,405-407, 419, 425, 435) deals with major inscriptions of ancient Tamiḷakam.

The Koṅkarpuḷiyaṅkuḷam Tamiḷ-Brāhmī record is the earliest evidence that indicates the Jain affiliation of Chēra. It dates back to the 2nd century BCE which about talks the Chēraātaṇ who donated a cave for Jain monks (Mahadevan 2003:12: 334). The Mēṭṭuppaṭṭi Tamiḷ-Brāhmī record dating back to the 2nd century BCE strongly suggests the existence of Jainism and Jain monasteries in ancient Tamiḷakam. The reference of the term “āmaṇa” (Jain monk) is the indication of this

(Mahadevan 2003:36, 369). The cave inscription of Mēṭṭuppaṭṭi located near the Vaigai Dam is not far from the border of modern Kerala.

The Muttuppaṭṭi Tamil- Brāhmī inscriptions have been found on a Jain cave near Madurai in Tamilnāḍu. It dates 2nd century BCE, reads “*Nākaṭerurāi Muciṛikōṭaṇṭamakaṇ*”. This means *kōṭaṇ* or *Ko āṭaṇ* i.e., King āṭaṇ, the *iḷamakaṇ* aka junior prince of Muciṛi donated a cave shelter for the Jain monks. Two Chēra records dated 2nd century CE from Pugaḷūr Jain cave also refer to ‘*ko āṭaṇ*’ (Mahadevan 2003,56: 395). The mention of “*ko*” means king.

The Maṇārṅkōyil Tamil-Brāhmī of 2nd century C.E inscription mentions “*kuṇavāviṇṭaṇko ceyṭita paḷḷi*”. This relates Iḷaṅkō with Kuṇa, i.e., *Kuṇavayir Kottam* (Mahadevan 2003,89:447). From this record, it can be assumed that the Chēra prince named Iḷaṅgo lived during the second century at the place Kuṇa and the Jain temple might exist earlier as well. As mentioned earlier the word Kuṇa is mentioned in Cilppadikāram as well. From both literary and inscriptional evidence, it can be concluded that the Iḷaṅgo lived in the 2nd century CE or before that in Kuna and he was a patron of Jainism.

Another Tamil-Brāhmī inscription of the 3rd century CE from Edakkal caves in Wayanad also refers to *ko āṭaṇ* (Mahadevan 2003,82: 122, 435). The term āṭaṇ suffixed to most of the ancient Chēra rulers like Utiyaṇ Ceralathāṇ, Neḍuñceralathāṇ, Selavakkaduṅko Valiyathāṇ, etc. illustrated in the Saṅgam work *Paṭiṛruppattu* also talks about their Jain affiliation (Herbert, 2012: 32-33). The *Akanāṇūru*(2017. 55,246) and *Puṇaṇāṇūru*(2017. 65-66) talks about the *vadakkirikkaḷ* by the Chēra king Utiyaṇ Ceralathāṇ. The *vadakkirikkaḷ* is a Jain ritual which means fast until death. This also helps us to understand the close connection of Chēras with the Jain tradition.

Tamil-Brāhmī script on potsherd has been found from the site of Paṭṭaṇam, which is 17 km away from Mathilakam. There are 5 letters in this Tamil-Brāhmī inscription

scratched on a potsherd. The word has been read as ‘āmaṇa’ and the link may be the word ‘āmanen’ ‘sāmana’ means a senior Jain monk in ancient Tamiḷakam (Cherian, 2014: 32-33). The style of the letters allows the script to be dated to the 5th century CE. Paṭṭaṇam is considered one of the ports of ancient Tamiḷakam. Thus, the inscription from this site indicates the involvement of Jains in the trade activities of the region.

A fragmentary inscription has been discovered from Mathilakam in the year 2014. This unpublished inscription is engraved on a broken piece of a slab with 68cm long, 24cm wide, and 15-16cm thickness. It is kept in the School of Social Science Museum at MG University, Kottayam. The record says:

“Āmaṇa vadakkirukkai.....

lukkuvaychathu chēra.....

Pugaḷaṟuvāṇi chovareyūrna.....” (Dhiraj,2020: 132)

A Jain monk..... who fasts until their death

The fame of a female artist..... from Chovareyūrna

The second Mathilakam fragmentary inscription says:

“Thiru-kkuṇāvai..... Thēvarkku....” To Thirukkuṇāvai..... Thēvar

The translation of these inscriptions means sāmaṇa (Jain monk) *vadakkirikkaḷ* (Jain ritual, i.e., fast until death) has been already found in earlier inscriptions as well. This makes it clear about the Jain affiliation of the region. Along with this, the word ‘*pugaḷ*’ means fame and ‘*aṟuvāṇi*’ means dancing girl or prostitute. So, the term *pugaḷaṟuvāṇi* of Choverayūr means the famous dancing girl or courtesan from the region. Choverayūr, the place of *Pugaḷaṟuvāṇi* could be the Chovaram mentioned in medieval records and can be identified as Śūkapuram in Edappāḷ (Dhiraj, 2020: 132-133), Malappuram. From the translation of this record, it can be assumed as

either the temple has witnessed the *vadakkirikkaḷ* of a Jaina monk (*āmaṇaor āmanan*) or the record erected to commemorate the *vadakkirikkaḷ* of a monk at the temple (Dhiraj, 2020: 132). The ‘aṟuvāṇi’ dancing girl might donate or offer something to the temple.

The medieval inscriptions related to Jainism have been found from various regions of Kerala. After a detailed assessment of these records, it can be easily stated that Thirukkuṇāvai or Thrikkaṇamathilakam was an important Jain centre. It was a Jain core temple modeled for the other Jain temples such as Thāzhekkav, Ālathūr, Paruvassery.

The inscription related to Kuṇavāi temple was recovered from the neighbourhood of an ancient Jain Basti at Thāzhekkav near Wayanad. This record may be assigned towards the end of the 9th century CE. The inscription suggests that the rules of Thirukkuṇāvai were the model of the Thāzhekkav temple. It states, “those who obstruct the properties of Thāzhekkav shall be deemed as offenders against Thirukkuṇāvai (Narayanan, 1972: 75)

Ālathūr inscription was another record. It dates back to the 10th century. This document unequivocally proves that *Thirukkuṇāvai*, which formed the model for the *paḷḷikal* was also a Jain temple (Narayanan, 1972: 73-74) The inscription records an agreement by *Nālpāthennayiravar*, the adhikarār of *Thirukkuṇāvai*. It is regarding the *paḷḷikal* (non-Hindu temples) of ‘*valancciyār*’ and their property. Those who committed an offence against the agreement shall be deemed as offenders against the deity of *Thirukkuṇāvai* (Narayanan, 1972: 73-75)

The Koḷam inscription of Rāma Kulaśekhara dating back to the 12th century is the last Jain record found from Kerala about the Chēra dynasty. He is considered the last Chēra ruler. The early medieval period saw the revivalism of Hinduism in Kerala due to the teachings and philosophy of Ādi Śankarācārya. This led most of the medieval Chēra rulers into the patrons of Shaivism and Vaishnavism. However, the inscriptional evidence suggests that the last Chēra ruler, Rāma Kulaśekhara was

a patron of Jainism. His Koḷam inscription helps us to reconstruct the history of Jainism in Kerala during the 12th century.

The inscription has 4 parts and is in the format of a royal order (Dhiraj, 2018a :487-504). It not only helps us to know about the Jain affiliation of later Chēra but also illustrates the socio-political conditions of Chēra country. The first two parts dedicate to brahmins. This could be measured by him to rectify the wrongdoings of him and his predecessors. His conversion or affiliation to Jainism might have disturbed brahmins. So, the first two parts of Koḷam record could be the appeasement measure to solve the conflict with brahmins.

The last two records talk about Thirukkuṇāvai, the famous Jain centre. The record states that “from the current year onwards, a certain quantity of paddy, additionally, will go to the Thirukkuṇāvai Thēvaṛ, for the conduct of Thirukkūthu festival” (Dhiraj, 2018a :489). There is a reference in the inscription, which talks about collecting of paddy from the tenants directly by the king’s court for the worship in Thirukkuṇāvai temple. The *Thirukkuṇāvai* or *Kuṇavayīṛ kōttam* is another name of Thrikkaṇamathilakam, the Jain centre. This brings the Jain affiliation of Rāma Kulaśekhara. Thus, it made clear that the Jain affiliation of the ruler creates an internal problem within the Chēra Empire. This fuel ran with the invasion of Hoysala ruler Viṣṇuvarḍhan led to the decline of the Chēra dynasty and Jainism in Kerala (Dhiraj, 2018a :489-490).

During the 14th and 16th centuries, Saṁdeśakāvyaṣ like *Kokasaṁdeśa*, *śukasaṁdeśa*, and *Uṇiachicharitam* referred to *Kuṇavayīṛ kōttam*. The 14th-century work *Uṇiachicharitam* describes Kuṇavāi as an important town like Mangalapuram and Kodungallur. The anonymous author of *Kokasaṁdeśa* refers to Kuṇavāias *Gunaka* or *Kuṇaka*.

He had also stated that the brahmins were not allowed to see the lord of Kuṇaka (Pillai, Elamkulam, 1999: 58). The *Kokasaṁdeśa* was completed in 1400 CE It mentions Thrikkaṇamathilakam. The work gives plenty of information about places like Kuṇaka(Thrikkaṇamathilakam)and Vañci before it reaches *Thiruvanchikkulam*.

This work shows the importance of the area has as it is in close proximity to Vañci, the old capital of Chēra rulers, and *Mahodayapuram*, which was the capital of the Chēra kingdom later.

Similarly, Mathilakam finds its place in the work of Lakṣmīdāsa called *śukasañdeśa* which was completed around the 14th century. The work revolves around a lover who is in Rameswaram sending a message to his counterpart in Thrikkaṇamathilakam.

Conclusion

A popular notion is that the Thrikkaṇamathilakam was an important Jain centre and Iḷaṅgo Aḍigaḷ wrote Cilppadikāram from there. The empirical evidence received by the researcher confirms this hypothesis. A large number of earliest inscriptions mention the Chēra rulers, their Jain affiliation, and the role played by Thrikkaṇamathilakam during the Chēra period. Tamiḷ-Brāhmī inscriptions from Paṭṭaṇam and fragmentary inscriptions from Mathilakam undoubtedly indicate the Jain tradition of this region. It can't be said that Thirukkuṇāvai and Thrikkaṇamathilakam are different. Because another inscription from the Thrikkaṇamathilakam starts with the lines “Thirukkuṇāvai Thevarkk”. Hence it can be summed up that both Thrikkaṇamathilakam and Thirukkuṇāvai are in the same region. The evidence of rectangular wells found in Mathilakam is similar to wells found in Wayanad and Palakkad which were also Jain centres.

After a detailed study of literary evidence and careful observation of inscriptional evidence, it can be concluded that Thrikkaṇamathilakam was an important Jain centre of Chēra and Iḷaṅgo Aḍigaḷ wrote Cilppadikāram from here. It received the patronage of the Chēra kingdom till the 12th century. The Koḷam inscription of Rāma Kulaśekhara talks about the Thirukkuṇāvai, the famous Jain centre. His affiliation towards Jainism along with the internal problems led to the decline of the Chēra dynasty and thereby the decline of Jainism. Similarly, the emergence of the Bhakti movement in the medieval period played a crucial role in the further deterioration of Jainism. The revival of Hinduism and teaching of Ādi Śankarācārya

led to the deprival of Jain doctrines in Kerala. This coincided with the conversion of many Jain centres into Hindu temples. Thrikkanamathilakam also faced the same fate.

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Figures



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Fig.1. Mathilakam Vatteluttu Inscription I (Part-I)-Mathilakam.

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 චූෂ්ඨ ජාතරාජ
 ජාතරාජ ජාතරාජ



Fig.2 Mathilakam Vatteḷuttu Inscription I (Part-II) -Mathilakam



Fig.3. Mathilakam Vatteḷuttu Inscription II, Mathilakam