
Jaina Women and Their Identity as Reflected in the Early South Indian Inscriptions (c. 1st Century BCE - 12th Century CE)

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Abstract: *Studies on the status of Women in historical context exclusively based on the analysis of epigraphical sources are few and far between, particularly in the case of Tamil, Kannada and Kerala regions of India. This paper will analyse the position and roles of Jain women as recorded in early and medieval inscriptions of the ancient Tamilakam including Karnataka and Kerala regions of Peninsular India. The study shows that Jain women in the records were largely Nuns and religious teachers who played a significant role in the spiritual scenario of the society and period under discussion. Records mention them as Kuratti, Kanti and Kavundi. They were described as carving out caverns and endowing them to other monks and Nuns of the same sect. They also constructed temples and basties. They made munificent land grants and other endowments to the Jain establishments called Pallis. They played the role of chief priestesses of the temples. In certain cases, they even organized monasteries exclusively for the Nuns and involved in large scale missionary and other spiritual activities. They provided public utilities for the common people. These inscriptions also attest to the role of the lay Jaina woman followers such as queens, princesses, family members of the subordinate rulers, dancing girls, etc. These noble women also donated temples, installed memorial stones, made land grants and other gifts for their spiritual emancipation. They took part in a variety of Jaina rituals, cults and ceremonies. They witnessed and observed rituals like Sallekhana (fasting to death). This study has shown that women's representation in Jain records of the period under study compared with men is less, indicating their limited social exposure. At the same time, the women appear to have enjoyed a high social as well as economic status in the society as they were represented as patrons of the Jain temples and institutions, being in or close to the ruling strata of the society. It should also be mentioned that, compared to other faiths, the Jain church was well ornamented with the presence of Nuns and other scholarly women revealing an egalitarian face of Jainism in terms of gender equality, which in later times was largely imitated and followed by other Indian faiths and sectarian faiths.*

Keywords: Jainology, Epigraphical Sources, South Indian Jainism, Women's History, Position of Jaina Women, Feminine Equality, Cultural Legacy

Introduction

The ancient and medieval ages can definitely contribute a plethora of splendid and glorious chapters in the women's history of India in general and South India in

particular. The studies on women's typical role within a religion and certain women in the religious history of these ages could be more remarkable. Historical researches on the statues of South Indian women in a particular belief system, primarily based on the examination of inscriptional evidences are little and scarce. In the light of this, the study of the prominence and various roles of Jaina women as reflected in the ancient and medieval inscriptions (c.1st Century BCE - 12th Century CE) of the southern part of Peninsular India can be a significant one. For the sake of convenience, the present study is divided into three parts based on the modern Indian state's political boundaries, viz., Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala.

Tamil Nadu

The earliest available evidence related to the study belongs to the group of Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions from different parts of Tamil Nadu. Alagarmalai hills, situated thirty kilometres north of Madura town, contribute a short inscription (Mahadevan 2003, No.41: 375), assigned to c.1st Century BC, that refers to a Jain Nun (*Pammitti*) named *Sappamitta* caused to be carved out a rock shelter and donated to other Jain ascetics. Another inscription from Sittanavasal in Pudukottai district (c.1st Century CE) indicates that the stone bed in the cave was made by one "*Ilayar of Thenku Chirupocil*" (*Tenkū Cirupocil*) to a *Kavuti* born at *Kumulur* in *Erumainatu* (Mahadevan 2003, No.49: 385). The term 'Kavuti' could be *Kavundi*, used to denote Jain Nuns in the ancient Tamil country. We have an elaborate reference to *Kavundi* denoting a Jain Nun in the epic *Silappadikaram* (1939, Cantos 13, 15, 27: 4-5,190,209,214,217,307-308).

Two records from Pugalur near Coimbatore (c.2nd Century CE) refer to the gift of a cave *palli* (hermitage) along with stone seat by one *Kiran Korri*, the younger daughter (*kuru makal*) of *Pittan* (Mahadevan 2003, No.65-66: 412-413). The Sangam songs in *Akananuru* (2018, Poems 77,143) and *Purananuru* (2018, Poems 168-172) speak of one *Pittan*, and his son *Pittan Kotran*¹. *Akananuru* (2018, Poems 77,143) refers to *Pittan* as the "charitable commander with the unfailing sword of Chera king". *Purananuru* (2018, Poems 172,168nt-172nt) precisely mentioned his son *Pittan Kotran* as the chieftain of the Chera king Kotha. In this light, it could be said that *Kiran Korri* was a younger daughter of the Chera commander *Pittan*, and they seem to be the followers of Jainism.

The c.4th Century CE Nekanurpatti Tamil-Brahmi inscription (Mahadevan 2003, No.83: 437) speaks of the establishment of a *Palli* (hermitage) by *Chekkanti-anni*, the mother of *Chekkanti* of Perumpokal ("perumpokal-cekkanti-tayiyaru-cekkant-[i]-anni-ceyivitta-palli"). The suffix 'Kanti' with the name *Chekkanti* could also be denoting a Jain Nun (Mahadevan 2003: 612). *Kanti* could be the Kannada form of Tamil *Kavundi*. We above noticed the Nun named *Kavuti* of the Sittanavasal record (Mahadevan 2003: 612) and *Kavundi Adikal* of the *Silappadikaram* (1939, Cantos 13, 15, 27: 4-5,190,209,214,217,307-308). *Kanti* and *Kavundi* could be derived from the Sanskrit word *Kantha* means 'patched garment' (Desai 1957: 85nt). *Chekkanti-anni* and her daughter *Chekkanti* of Perumpokal seem to be Jaina female ascetics. As in the case of *Pammitti Sappamitta* of the Alagarmalai record (Mahadevan 2003, No.41: 375), the Nun is depicted as a donor

of the cavern to other ascetics. These factors could be examples of the prosperity enjoyed by Jain Nuns in *Tamilakam* in the early historical period.

There are a large number of short Tamil vatteluttu inscriptions (*SII*. Vol. V, No.319, 321-324,326, 355-356, 370-372, 394, 398: 122-123, 127, 129, 132-133; Desai 1957: 67) from Kalugumalai in Kovilpatti taluk (Thoothukudi district) that describe the pious activities of Jain Nuns. All these records designate them as *Kurattikal*. *Kuratti* is the Tamil feminine denotation for the Sanskrit *Guru* (teacher) (Desai 1957: 67). The Kalugumalai records contain references to *Tiruchcharanam Kuratti*, *Pichchai Kuratti*, *Sanga Kuratti*, *Mammai Kuratti*, *Tiruparutti Kuratti*, *Mi alur Kuratti*, *Milaloor Kuratti*, *Nalkur Kuratti*, *Perur Kuratti*, *Tirumalai Kuratti*, etc.

These inscriptions clearly suggest that Kalugumalai hill was one of the core centers of Jain Nun's missionary activities in South India. Altogether, there are twenty-seven Jain Nuns mentioned in the inscriptions from Tamil-Kerala regions with the term 'Kuratti' attached to their names (Cort 1998: 195). Among them are the *Pattini Kuratti Adigal* in the Vilapakkam inscription (Ekambaranathan and Sivaprasam 1987, No.361: 290-291; Desai 1957: 41-42), the *Kanakavira Kurattiyar* in the Vedal inscription (*SII*. Vol. III, No.92: 224-225; Vol. XIII, No.245: 130; Ekambaranathan and Sivaprasam 1987, No.357: 286-287), and the *Gunandangi Kurattikal* of Chitharal inscription (*TAS*. Vol. I, No. XII. B: 284,287) are some of the remarkable *Kurattikal*. Most of these inscriptions mention that the *Kurattikal* caused to be made and donated caverns, forecourts, images, sculptures, steps, wells, and other amenities for the *Pallies* from where these records were found. They had also arranged utilities for the ascetics attached to the monastery. In this light, it is reasonable to suppose that, during ancient and medieval periods, these *Kuratti* group of teachers cum Nuns of Tamil and Kerala regions were financially well off to make donations and charities. Those Nuns seem to have played a great role in the spread of Jina's doctrine in *Tamilakam*; which could be a significant and glorious epoch in the historical Jainology of Peninsular India.

The Hosakote plates of the Western Ganga king Avinita (c.469–529 CE), refer to the setting up of a Jain temple at *Pulliura* (*Pulliyur*) in Korikunda Vishaya by the mother of a Pallava king Simhavishnu (ARMAD 1938: 84, 86, 90; Ramesh 1984: 49-51). She is said to have constructed the temple for the glory of her husband's² family as well as for her own merit ("bhartri-kula-kirtti-jananyaartthanch-[a]-atmanascha-dharma-pravarddhanarth ancha-pratishthapitaya") (ARMAD 1938, L. 24: 84). It is not unreasonable to suppose that the Pallava queen was a follower of Jainism. Avinitha made *Pulliura* village tax-free with water-pouring facilities to this temple of Arhat (ARMAD 1938: 86, 90; Ramesh 1984: 49-51).

Sattamangalam (Tiruvannamalai district) rock inscription ((Mahalingam 1988: 287-288) of the Pallava king Nandivarman II (c.730-796 CE) records the gift of seventeen *Kalanju* of gold by one *Punda Muppavai*³, daughter of a monk called *Jinadiyar* of *Vilukkam*, to generate certain measure of rice every morning to the Jain temple called *Pavanandivar*

(Chatterjee 1978: 212), possibly constructed by *Pavanandi* alias *Bavanandi*⁴, one of the prominent Jain scholars of South India.

Another Sattamangalam inscription (c.875 CE) (Sampath 1968: 159; Nagaswamy 1970: 121-125; Chatterjee 1978: 212; Mahalingam 1988: 532) of the Pallava king Kampavarman (863-895 CE) speaks of the renovation of a *Perumpalli* (big Jain temple-complex) in Sattamangalam area by one Madhavi, the wife of Kadagadiyariyar. The Jain temples which she renovated also included the one caused to be erected by *Pavanandi Bhattara* alias *Bavanandi Bhattarar*. She also renovated the monastery, constructed a sub-shrine for *Iyakki Padari*, and built an extension from the front hall (*mukhamandapa*) to the central shrine.

Madhavi also donated a giant bell (*perumani*) to the *Perumpalli*. Kadagadiyariyar, the husband of Madhavi, could be a Pallava feudatory of the Sattamangalam region. According to the inscription, the central shrine was consecrated to lord Jina, and it was also attached with a sub-shrine of *Iyakki Padari*. *Iyakki Padari* could mean *Yakshi Bhattari* or Goddess *Yakshi*. Attaching a separate shrine for *Yakshi* in a Jain temple could be one of the noteworthy signs for the development of *Yakshi* cult in the Tamil country. One of the significant aspects of the medieval south Indian Jainism was the substantial development of *Yakshi* cult. The prominence of Nuns in the church pyramid could have considerably influenced the development of *Yakshi* cult in Jainism, especially in the Tamil-Kerala regions.

The Vedal inscription (Vellore district), issued in the 14th regnal year of Aditya Chola I (c.871-907 CE), records a royal order that the lay disciples to protect and feed the Jain female ascetic *Kanakavira Kurattiyar* and her lady pupils of the monastery at Vidal alias *Madevi-Arandimangalam* on the eastern side of the Singapura Nadu (SII. Vol. III, No.92: 224-225; Vol. XIII, No.245: 130; Ekambaranathan and Sivaprakasam 1987, No. 357: 286-287). This record further states that there was a disagreement between five hundred pupils and hundred female ascetics of the monastery. *Kanakavira Kurattiyar*, the daughter of the chief of the village, was the disciple of one *Gunakirtti Bhatara*. It is not unreasonable to suppose that Vedal had a *Perumpalli* (big Jain establishment) largely of female ascetics existed during medieval age.

Vilapakkam (Arcot region) inscription dated 945 CE (Ekambaranathan and Sivaprakasam 1987, No. 361: 290-291; Desai 1957: 41-42) belongs to the period of rule of Parantaka Chola I (c.907-950 CE) it commemorates the digging of a well there by a Nun *Pattini Kuratti Adigal*. She was a disciple of the well-known saint *Arishtanemi Bhattara* of the Tiruppanmalai palli. After that, the well, and a house near it developed into a monastery for exclusive use by Nuns, it was then placed under the supervision of a body called 'twenty-four' consisting of twenty-four representatives of the village. 'The Twenty Four' could be a reference to the twenty-four Tirthankaras of the Jaina spiritual pantheon⁵. P. B. Desai translated the expression *Pattini Kuratti Adigal* as "Her Holiness Fasting Lady Preceptor" (Desai 1957: 41).

Panchapandavamalai (Vellore district) inscription of Rajaraja Chola I (985-1014 CE) records certain gifts made by one Lataraja Vira Chola to the holy feet of the god on the Tiruppanmalai hill alias Panchapandavamalai on account of the wishes of his queen Latamahadevi (EI. Vol. IV: 137-140). The gifts mentioned are: viz., *Karpuravilai* (cost of camphor), and *Anniyayavavadandavirai* (the tax on the unauthorized loom). According to the record, the 'cost of camphor' from the tax-free land (*pallichantham*) enjoyed by the temple of Tiruppanmalai, which was collected from the village of *Kuraganpadi* had been taken away by the former ruler of the locality. On account of that "Lataraja Vira Chola's queen Latamahadevi thinking: this charity (*dharma*) gets ruined," so she made the following request to her husband: - "you must assign the 'cost of camphor' and the 'tax on unauthorized looms' to the shrine" (EI. Vol. IV: 139). Lataraja Vira Chola could be a feudatory of the Cholas.

Dadapuram (Villupuram district) Tamil vatteluttu inscription (Ekambaranathan and Sivaprakasam 1987, No.427: 356-357) of Rajaraja Chola I provides the details of the construction of three temples at Rajarajapuram by Princess *Pirantakan Kundavai Pirattiyar*. *Kundavai Pirattiyar* could be the daughter, elder sister, and wife of Parantaka Chola II, Rajaraja Chola I, and Vandyadeva, (Pallava king) respectively⁶. Three temples established by the princess were known as *Kundavai Jinalaya*, *Kundavai Vinnagar*, and *Iravikula Manikyesvaram*. The last mentioned one could be a Shiva shrine whereby the inscription has been engraved. This inscription also contains details regarding the vessels and jewels made of gold, silver, and pearl presented to the temples. We have another record from the Vishnu temple at Dadapuram which too contains the same details provides by the aforesaid inscription (Ekambaranathan and Sivaprakasam 1987: 357). This Vishnu temple could be the *Kundavai Vinnagar* in both records. The descriptions and locations of two records help us to reach a reasonable conclusion that the princess *Kundavai Pirattiyar* constructed and dedicated three temples for three major deities, Viz., Lord Siva, Lord Vishnu, and Lord Jina. On the basis of a record belonging to the reign of Rajendra Chola, the *Kundavai Jinalaya* can be located on the Tirumalai hill (SII. Vol. I, No.67: 97). There is a good probability that the *Kundavai Jinalaya* constructed by the princess also contains the same inscription with same details. However, the above discussed Dadapuram inscriptions clearly reveals the religious tolerance of the female members of the Chola court.

Tirumalai inscription (1024 CE) of Rajendra Chola (1012-1044 CE) records a gift as a 'holy lamp' (*tirunanda*) to the 'god of the holy mountain' (Tirumalai) made by one *Ilaiya Mani Nangai* (SII. Vol. I, No.68: 100-101). *Ilaiya Mani Nangai* could be a royal lady probably belongs to the Chola family. The inscription further says that she has been given some amount of money (20 *kasu*) for the maintenance of the lamp by cultivating the land granted for the same purpose. By the yield of the land, the lamp shall be kept up perpetually as long as the sun and the moon endure. She also donated 60 *kasu* for the maintenance of another lamp of the temple donated by one *Sinnavai* (SII. Vol. I, No.68: 101). *Sinnavai* was mentioned as the queen of the Pallava king. *Sinnavai's* gift probably made during the Pallava ascendancy which took place before the mediaeval

Chola supremacy in the Tamil country. The Pallava queen's marriage alliance with the Chola family as well can be an obvious supposition.

Another same dated record from the same site belonging to the reign of the same ruler states about one Chamundappai, the wife of the merchant Nannappayan gave a lamp (*tirunanda*) as *pallichantham* to the *Kundavai Jinalaya* on the Tirumalai hill (SII.Vol.I, No.67: 95-99). The donor has lived at a place called Perumbanappadi alias Karaivari Malliyur. *Kundavai Jinalaya* could be constructed by the Princess *Pirantakan Kundavai Pirattiyan*, the daughter of Parantaka Chola II, detailed in the aforesaid Dadapuram record of Rajaraja Chola I (Ekambaranathan and Sivaprakasam 1987, No.427: 356-357).

Karnataka

Devarahalli (Chamarajanagar district) Inscription (EC. Vol. IV, Ng.85; IA. Vol. II: 155-161; Ramesh 1984: 182-189) of the Western Ganga king Sripurusha (c.726-788 CE) refers to one *Kandachchi*, the daughter of the Pallava queen and Maruvarman of *Sagara* family, caused to be erected a Jain temple known as *Lokatilaka* on the northern corner of Sripara (*Sripuram*)⁷. She was the wife of *Prithivi-Nirgunda-Raja* alias *Paramagula* of the *Bana-kula* of *Nirgunda-nadu*, the Ganga feudatory. Sripurusha donated a village namely *Ponnalli* in the *Nirgunda-Vishaya* to *Lokatilaka* Basti by the request of *Paramagula*. Devalapura record (750 CE) of Sripurusha (EC. Vol. III, My.25) refer to a land grant in Gudalur made by a Jain lady namely *Arattiti* as the part of her son *Singam* having taken *Jina diksha* (consecration).

Narasapura (Kolar district) copper plates (903 CE) of the Ganga King Rachamalla II Satyavakya (c.870-907) refers to a Nun namely *Kamungare Kanti*, the chief priestess of the Kannamangala Jain temple (EC. Vol. X, Kl.90; Ramesh 1984: 327-333). She was mentioned as the disciple of *Uttanandipuri Mandala Bhattara*, the disciple of *Kamungare Kadahura Bhatara*. Sudi plates (Dharwar district) speak of the Chaityalaya at Sundi alias Sudi was caused to be built by Divalambika (EI. Vol. III: 158-159,180,184), the queen of the Ganga king Butuga II (c.938-961 CE). The Chaityalaya received sixty *nivartanas* of land for the purpose of repair, worship and provide food. Divalambika also "celebrated the sacrificial rites of six female mendicants of the temple" (EI. Vol. III: 181,184). The undated Ichavadi (Shimoga District) inscription (ARMAD 1923: 114-115) of Butuga II also speaks about some money offerings by his queen for the worship of a *Jinalaya* which was constructed and granted by one of his ancestors. Kadalur (Mandyā district) plates (962 CE) refer to the establishment of a *Jinalaya* by one *Kallabba* (EI. Vol. XXXVI: 106; Ramesh 1984: 447), the mother of the Ganga king Marasimha II Satyavakya (c.962-974 CE). Kallabba was the daughter of the Chalukya king Simhavarman.

Hosanagara (Shimoga district) inscription (1077 CE) of the Chalukya king Tribhuvanamalla states about the construction of *Pancha-vasadi* (five Basties) called *Urvvi-tilakam* by Chattala Devi (EC. Vol. VIII, Nr.35), daughter of the younger brother of the Ganga

king Rakkasaganga alias Rachamalla V (c.986-1024 CE). Chattala Devi, received her *Jina diksha* from Saint *Srivijaya Bhataraka*. When the grant was made, Nanni Santara, son of Chattala Devi was a Chalukya feudatory. Chattala Devi constructed the *Pancha Basti* as a memorial to her father Arumuli-Deva (brother of Rakkasaganga) and certain other family members. Her husband was the *Kaduvetti*, lord of the Kanchi, the Pallava king. Her preceptor was *Srivijaya Bhataraka*; he is well talented in all *Sastras* and *Agamas*. He belongs to *Nandi-gana* of the *Arungalanvaya* of the *Nidumbare-tirtha* of the *Tiyan-gudi*. His disciple Sreyamsa Pandita laid the foundation for *Urvvi-tilakam* (*Pancha Basti*). Sreyamsa Pandita and other disciples of Srivijaya Bhataraka such as Chollata, Santa Deva, Gunasena Deva, Dayapala Deva, Kamalabhadra Deva, and Ajitasena Pandita Deva sanctified the *Pancha Basti*. Chattala Devi and her son Nanni Santara Deva along with some others granted certain villages to *Pancha Basti* for further maintenance, worship and other purposes.

Santala Devi, the Chief Queen of Hoysala king Vishnuvardhana was a staunch Jain. Her all family members were the adherent followers of the 'Faith of Lord Jina.' Inscriptions enlighten us that she made a plethora of contribution to the Kannada Jainism, especially for the development of Shravanabelagola Jain establishment. Santala Devi was crowned as the chief queen in 1120 CE (EC. Vol. V, Bl.16). According to the inscriptions, her *guru* was one Prabhachandra Siddhanta Deva; her mother was Machikabbe; her father was Perggade Marasingayya; her uncle was Perggade Singimayya; her royal consort was the great king Vishnuvardhana; her ever favourite god was Lord *Jina Natha* (EC. Vol. II, SB.143). A 1123 CE inscription again ascertain that Santala Devi was 'rampart' to the Jain faith (EC. Vol. II, SB.132). According to the present record, Santala Devi constructed a *Basti* named *Savatigandhavarana* at Shravanabelagola. The *Savatigandhavarana Basti* caused to build by Santala Devi had been named after her as *Santala Devi Basti*. She endowed a village Mottenavile in Kalkani-nadu along with some wetland to the *Santala Devi Basti* (EC. Vol. II, SB.132, 143). The endowment had been presented to the feet of her *guru* Prabhachandra, a disciple of Meghachandra Traividya Deva. Another 1123 CE Shravanabelagola inscription (EC.Vol.II,SB.131) states that Santala Devi installed an image of god *Shanti Deva* in the *Santala Devi Basti*. It describes Santala Devi as "*a bee at the lotus feet of the lord of sages Prabhachandra*". A 1131 CE Shravanabelagola record (EC. Vol. II, SB.143) refers to the death of Santala Devi at Sivaganga. It also refers to the virtuous observation of *Sallekhana* for one month by her mother Machikabbe in the presence of the latter's *gurus* Prabhachandra, Vardhamana, and Ravichandra at Shravanabelagola.

A number of Shravanabelagola inscriptions also inform us that the female members of the family of Ganga Raja-the great minister of Hoysala Vishnuvardhana-were significant contributors to the Kannada Jainism. Their patronisation to the Shravanabelagola Jain establishment could be a remarkable part in the history Jainism in Karnataka. Ganga Raja's mother Pochala Devi (Pochavve) set up a temple in Belagola (EC. Vol. II, SB.73, 125). His wife Lakshmi Devi as well have fame for the construction of *Basti* there (EC. Vol. II, SB.73, 125). Interestingly, two 1118 CE records

state that 'after Ganga Raja's victory over the army of the Chalukyas in the battle of *Kannegal*, he captured the supplies and vehicles of the enemy were presented to his master (Vishnuvardhana), the king being pleased and said "*I am pleased, ask for boon. Thereupon the obtainer of (the king's) supreme favour asked for neither kingdom nor wealth, but, intent on the worship of Arhat, asked for the imperishable gift of Parama village; and having obtained it and granted the same to provide for worship in the Jina temples lovingly erected by his mother Pochala Devi (Pochavve) and his wife Lakshmi Devi*" (EC. Vol. II, SB. 73,125). In the year 1113 CE, Lakshmi Devi set up an epitaph to commemorate the *Sallekhana* death of her brother Buchana (EC. Vol. II, SB.126). In the year 1115 CE, Ganga Raja and Lakshmi Devi together erected an epitaph which records the *sallekhana* death of their teacher Meghachandra Traividya Deva (EC. Vol. II, SB.127). Another Inscription (1118 CE) says that Ganga Raja caused to be erected a Jain Basti called *Kattale-Basti* for his mother Pochavve (EC. Vol. II, SB.70). In the year 1120 CE, he also set up an epithet there to commemorate her *Sanyasanamarana* (EC. Vol. II, SB.118). Lakshmi Devi had died by *Samadhi (sallekhana)* in the year 1121 CE, and for commemorates her death Ganga Raja set up an epitaph on the same Shravanabelagola hill (EC. Vol. II, SB.128). A large number of inscriptions from Shravanabelagola further refers about *Samadhimarana* and other Jain pious activities observed by Ganga Raja's family members (EC. Vol. II, SB.118, 127,367,368, 384,385,400). From these records, we can learn that Jakkanabbe, wife of the elder brother of Ganga Raja was a very pious lady. She was also the mother of the Hoysala general Boppadeva. Her husband was also a general under the Hoysalas. She constructed a small tank called *Jakki Katte* near the *Bhandari Basti* in Shravanabelagola (EC. Vol. II, SB.368). And she also caused to be sculpted some Jain reliefs on the boulders near the *Jakki Katte* and then sanctified (EC. Vol. II, SB.367-368). She built a *Basti* at Sanehalli, about two kilometres far from Shravanabelagola and endowed certain quantity of land to the temple (EC. Vol. II, SB.400). She installed there the first Tirthankara of the Jaina pantheon, the Rishabha Natha.

During the year 1181 CE, one Achiyakka, the wife of the Hoysala king Ballala II's (c.1173-1220 CE) minister Chandramauli, caused to be erected a Basti for god Parsvanatha, now called *Akkana Basti*, at Shravanabelagola (EC.Vol.II,SB.327,331; Vol.V,Cn.150). On account of the request made by Chandramauli, King Ballala granted the village Bammeyanahalli to the god Parsvanatha of *Akkana Basti*.

Kerala

Tirucharanam alias Chitharal in the Travancore region of Kerala was a great center of Jain Nun's and other pious women's activities. During the region of Aye king Vikramaditya Varaguna, Nun's missionary activities centered on the *Tirucharanam* reached its zenith. An old Tamil-Malayalam vatteluttu epigraph (TAS. Vol. II and III: 126) from Chitharal refers to on *Pattini Bhattarar*, the preceptor of Aye king Vikramaditya Varaguna (c.885-925 CE). *Pattini Bhattarar* could be a female ascetic because the term 'Pattini' usually suffixed with the female Nun's names in the mediaeval Tamil and Kerala country. In this regard, a Nun namely *Pattini Kuratti*

Adigal in the Vilapakkam inscription (Ekambaranathan and Sivaprakasam 1987, No.361: 290-291; Desai 1957: 41-42) could be a remarkable instance. Here the term ‘Pattini’ could be denoted ‘fasting,’ that commonly observed by ascetic for their spiritual satisfaction.

Another Chitharal record (TAS. Vol. IV, No.40: 148) says that the chief shrine for the *Tiruchcharanam Bhattariyar* (goddess of *Tiruchcharanam*) was constructed during the 21st ruling year (906 CE) of king Varaguna by one lady namely *Moottavala Naranakuttiyar*. Besides, she made an arrangement for a perpetual lamp in front of the deity. For this purpose, she endowed certain quantity of land and a golden lamp along with a golden flower to the *Bhattariyar*. During the 28th regnal year of Varaguna, one *Gunandangi Kurattikal*, a disciple of *Arettanemi Bhattara* donated some gifts made of gold to the *Tiruchcharanam Bhattariyar* (TAS. Vol. I: 284,287). A Sanskrit inscription with Grantha character (c.10th Century CE) from the same temple refers to a lady named *Vijayabhadra Vipaschit* set up a stone entrance to the shrine of the “excellent deity” of *Tiruchcharanam* (TAS. Vol. IV, No.41: 148).

Two Kalugumalai inscriptions (Kovilpatti taluk, Tamil Nadu) refer to one *Kurattikal* (Jain Nun) from *Tiruchcharanam* made certain contributions to the god on the Kalugumalai hill (SII. Vol.V, No. 324, 326: 123). Another epigraph from the same site refers to one *Milaloor Kurattikal* of *Tiruchcharanam* caused to be sculptured an image on the Kalugumalai (SII. Vol. V, No.321: 123). The *Tiruchcharanam Kurattikal*’s contributions to the Kalugumalai Jain hill clearly indicates the frequent contact between the Nuns of these two prominent Jain centres of Peninsular India. Moreover, it is also reasonable to figure out that the Jaina Nuns in the medieval Tamil and Kerala regions were financially well enough to make donations to the basties, monasteries, temples and other affiliated Jain establishments.

Descriptions referring to ‘*amana-vadaikkirukai...nnangalukku vaychatu-chera-pukazharu vaani-chovareyyoor-na...*’ by a fragmentary vatteluttu inscription of c.7th or c.8th Century CE, recently discovered from Mathilakam near Kodungallur (Trissur district), is crucial at this juncture (Dhiraj 2018: 18, 32, 34, 248, 331, Fig.4-5; 2016: 56). *Amana* and *Vadakkirikal* in the record undoubtedly unveil its Jain association. *Amana* is an evolved form of Tamil *Camana* or Prakrit *Samana* to denote Jain monks, particularly in ancient Tamilakam (Mahadevan 2003: 129). *Vadakkirikal* is the Tamilized or Malayalamized form of *Sallekhana* (*Santhara* or *Samadhi-marana* or *Sanyasana-marana*), meant to the Jain follower’s holy observance of fasting to death⁸. *Pugal Aruvaani* of *Chovareyyoor* could be a dancing girl who hails from *Chovarayyoor*. Presently, the Tamil-Malayalam word *Pugal* means fame and the *Aruvaani* mean prostitute. The *Pugal Aruvaani* could be denoted in the record as a famous dancing girl or a courtesan. The word *Aruvaani* could be derived from two words ‘*ara*’ and ‘*vaani*’. *Ara* means stage and *Vaani* represent ‘speaking or perform very dramatically on the stage or somewhere else’. It simply means that a dancer or stage performer. At the same time ‘*ara*’ has also the meaning as room and ‘*vaani*’ can be traced from *Vanijya* or *Vanibham* means trade or business. So,

Aruvaani in the later period began to interpret as a person who sells something inside the room or simply infer as a prostitute or courtesan. We have to read this fact in the light of degradation met by *Devadasis* during the later age as mere prostitutes. Nowadays in Kerala, the term 'Aruvaani' using as an abusive word to designate a lady who following immoral life as equal to prostitute⁹. But in the medieval period, history says, they bejeweled rich pride in the society. This inference is very clear in the light of Kerala's medieval *Manipravala Champus* (Unni 1985: 67-68) which were largely produced to eulogies those type of women who belonging to the clan of dancing girls. The medieval Sanskrit and *Manipravala* work like *Unniyachi Charithram*, *Unniyadi Charitham*, *Unni Chiruthevi Charitham*, *Unnuneeli Sandesam*, *Sukasandesa*, etc. are some of the examples for this observation.

Chovareyyoor, the place belongs to *Pugal Aruvaani* could be *Chovaram* in the medieval records, which can be identified as the modern Sukapuram in Edapal taluk of Malappuram district. It is interesting to note that the heroine of the quasi-historical Sanskrit message poem *Sukasandesa* by Lakshmidasa, Viz., Apphulla (Unni-appilla) alias Rangalakshmi was also hailed from *Chovaram*, but living at Gunaka (Unni 1985: 73, 75). *Sukasandesa* gives some interesting description about the city of *Gunaka* that already been identified (Unni 1985: 8; Narayanan 1972: 20-22) as the present Mathilakam from where the present inscription under discussion discovered. *Sukasandesa* also alludes to the prominence enjoyed by the dancing cum courtesans of Mathilakam (Unni 1985: 40-41). Whatever it may be, the descriptions in the record probably indicate that either an *amana* observed *Vadakkirikal* in the temple or the temple was constructed to commemorate his *Vadakkirikal*. The Jain temple either caused to be built by a *Pugal Aruvaani* or she donated something to this temple.

Summation

The study shows that Jain women in the records were largely Nuns and religious teachers who played a significant role in the spiritual scenario of the society and period under discussion. Records mention them as *Kuratti*, *Kanti* and *Kavundi*. They were described as carving out caverns and endowing them to other monks and Nuns of the same sect. They also constructed temples and *basties*. They made munificent land grants and other endowments to the Jain establishments called *Pallis*. They played the role of chief priestesses of the temples. In a few cases, they even organized monasteries exclusively for the Nuns and involved in large scale missionary and other spiritual activities. They provided public utilities for the common people. These inscriptions also attest to the role of the lay Jaina woman followers such as queens, princesses, family members of the subordinate rulers, dancing girls, etc. These noble women also donated temples, installed memorial stones, made land grants and other gifts for their spiritual emancipation. They took part in a variety of Jaina rituals, cults and ceremonies. They witnessed and observed rituals like *Sallekhana* (fasting to death). This study has further shown that women's representation in Jain records of the period under study compared to men is less, indicating their limited social exposure. At the same time, the women appear to have enjoyed a high social as well as economic status

in the society as they were represented as patrons of the Jain temples and institutions, being in or close to the ruling strata of the society. It should also be mentioned that compared to other faiths, the Jain church was well ornamented with the presence of Nuns and other scholarly women revealing an egalitarian face of Jainism in terms of gender equality, which in later times was imitated and followed by other faiths and sectarian faiths.

Notes

- ¹ Some scholars identified Pittan Kotran as Pittan Korran. Mahadevan 2003: 599.
- ² Here, the husband of the Pallava queen could be Simhavarman III of the Pallankovil plates of the Pallavas. Mahalingam 1988: 89-93. Her son Simhavishnu could be the son of Simhavarman III mentioned in the same record as the conqueror of the Chola country.
- ³ For another reading as Pundi Muppavai, see Chatterjee 1978: 212.
- ⁴ This inference could be evidentially fact full, because this record has further specified that the urar "agreed to protect this charity and the amount deposited by Bavanandi" Mahalingam 1988: 288. Furthermore, another inscription from the same site, belonging to the reign of the Pallava ruler Kampavarman refers to the renovation of a temple constructed by one Pavanandi. Sampath 1968: 159; Chatterjee 1978: 212.
- ⁵ The 'twenty-four has find mentioned in another inscription from Karuppankunru near Chengalpattu. Ekambaranathan and Sivaprakasam 1987: 291.
- ⁶ We have another Kundavai in the history of medieval South India; the daughter, younger sister, and wife of Rajaraja Chola, Rajendra Chola, and Vimaladitya (Eastern Chalukya king) respectively. SII. Vol. I: 97.
- ⁷ A version of the reading of Hosur record of the same ruler refers as Sripuram. For further details, see Ramesh 1984: 173. Original transcript of the Devarahalli record mentioned as Srivura. See EC. Vol. IV, Ng.85; IA. Vol. II: 158
- ⁸ The exclusive Tamil-Malayalam term 'Vadakkirikal' we first found in the Sangam classics like Akananuru and Purananuru; says that Chera ruler Udayan Cheralathan observed Vadakkirikal when after he lost in the battle at Venni against King Karikal Valavan. Akananuru 2018, Poem 55; Purananuru 2018, Poem.65-66.
- ⁹ At present, in the Tamil country, the word Aruvaani has also using to call eunuch (the third gender).

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