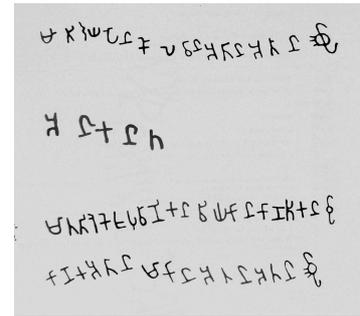




## HISTORY OF MADURAI



**Madurai**, the cultural capital of Tamilnad has a very long and continuous history of more than 2500 years. It was a center of academics where enormous early Tamil literary works flourished. This city served as the royal capital of Pandya rulers who established their regime even before the Christian era. Pandya rulers are mentioned in the Asokan rock edicts dated to 300 BCE as well as in Mahabharata and Ramayana, the two great epics of India. The existence of Madurai city is proved beyond doubt by both inscriptional records as well as literary evidences.

Kathyayana, the grammarian lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE mentions the Pandyas. Kautilya, the author of Arthashastra, describes the significance of pearls and muslin clothes produced at Pandya country. The Sanskrit classical writers like Varahamihira and Kalidasa also mention the Pandyas and Madurai. Madurai has good trade contact with Greek and Roman people. One Pandya king has sent an ambassador to the Roman king Augustus' court. Mahavamsam

the cylonese chronicle refers to the Pandya Empire.

Ptolamy (75 AD) and Pliny (130 AD) the foreign writers had mentioned Madurai in their travelogues. Two Tamil Bhrami inscriptions one from Mettupatti and another from Alagarmalai mention the name of this city as Mathirai. these records are assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE.

**Anaimalai (Elephant Hill)** An ancient hill, naturally looking like an elephant, lies at 8km distance from Madurai city is a quite interesting place to see. Though the elephant figure is a natural one it consists itself many man made historical and cultural values.

One very important historical record is engraved on the drip ledge of a natural cavern found at the terrace of the hill. This document is engraved in the ancient Bhrami characters and dated to 1 century CE. In this cavern more than 20 rock beds were scooped off for the stay of the Jain mendicants. This record mentions

the name of the hill as Iva kundram. The Prakrit prefix Ivam means elephant and kundram means hill. These rock beds were made and donated for Jains by two donors Eri Arithan and Aratta Kayipan.

Due to the advent of Bhakthi movement and by the serious efforts of Thirugnana sampantha, jainism had to face a setback during 7<sup>th</sup> CE in the whole of Pandya country. Thirugnana sampantha also mentions Anaimalai in one of his devotional songs, called Devaram, as a strong abode of Jains. But when the time turned to be convenient again jains re habituated at this hills with the patronization of the then Pandya rulers and local people. During this time the minds of both Saivites and Jains had changed. Saivites were ready to lend their helping hands for the Jains to re install their religious monuments and the Jains also were ready to accept the idol worship and admission of women in their religious fold equally. So, during 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> century CE, a galaxy of Jain images were carved by the Jains and they were patronized by royal officers, Brahmin sabhas and private individuals. Figures of Mahavira, Parsvanatha, Ambika yakshi are all seen now with a good state of preservation. The inscriptions engraved below each sculpture reveal the persons who were caused to cut these things. This place Anaimalai has also served as a treasure house of fine arts which is well attested by the murals found on the sculptures. Jain monks not only preach their religion among people but they educated them by making their cave residence as schools, they provided medical aid to the sick people and gave asylum to the needy. Thus this place serves as a symbol of religious tolerance and center for academic fine arts.

In the mean time, Vedic religions such as Saivism and Vaisnavism had also struck their roots at this important place. All over TamilNadu

this type of penetration was made by all religions in the places of importance of other sects. Like wise at Anaimalai, 2 cave temples were scooped out, one for Narashirmha- Vishnu, and the other one for Lord Muruga. Both these Gods are considered as vibrant and heroic in their deeds in their respective religions. Narashirmha cave was made during 770CE by one Marankari, the minister of Pandya King Varaguna I(768 AD – 815AD). Murugan cave now called as Ladan temple was also carved during almost in the same period. The successive rulers of this area continuously patronized the Narashirmha cave temple. Thus, Anaimalai has served as a great centre of religious harmony and cultural citadel for the past 2000 years.

**Arittapatti:** This small village lies at a 25km distance on Madurai Melur Main road. The name itself reveals its association with Jain religion. Arittanemi, a Jain monk who lived around Madurai, is mentioned in one record. Neminatha the 22<sup>nd</sup> Thirthankara had another name Arittanemi. So the village might have been named after that Thirthangara. In this village also there is a natural cavern in which number of rock beds were chiseled out for the convenient stay of Jain mendicants. On the forehead of this rock cave two early Tamil Brahmi inscriptions are engraved. They are assigned to 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE and are considered among the earliest records found around Madurai. The two Brahmi inscriptions reveal that the Pandya rulers of this area were caused to cut this rock shelter for the Jains. These rulers were hailed from the present Thirunelveli region which was also a fertile land mass included in the Pandyan country.

Just 10 meters away from the cave on the face of the rock one bas-relief sculpture of Mahavira is carved out. From the inscription found below the sculpture we come to know the name of the village, name of the hill and the people who caused to cut this image. The name of

the hill is mentioned as Thiruppinaiyanmalai (Now it is called as kalinja malai). On behalf of some officials this image was carved by one Ajjanandhi, a famous Jain Saint, who lived during 9-10 C AD at Madurai.

The people of the village Pathirikudi were accepted to safeguard this stone image. This Pathirikudi may be considered as the original ancient name of the present village Arittapatti. Traces of ancient paintings are also seen on the Mahavira image.

This village has also some significant features to be mentioned. On the other side of the hill Kalinja malai, an early Pandyan cave temple (8 Century CE) dedicated to Siva is found. This stands as the typical example for a Pandyan cave temple with a central shrine and a front mantapa. Sivalinga, located in the central shrine is scooped from the natural rock itself. Two Dwarapalaka images (Gate keepers) and sculptures of Lord Ganesh and Lakulisa Siva carved in the niches, one on either side of the mantapa are worthy of mention. Now this temple is named as Idaichi mantapa by the local folk.

One more ruined Siva temple is also located in this village, in which only basement alone is remaining. On the base a later Pandya inscription dated to 13 CE is engraved from which we come to know the village name Pathirikudi and the king Vikrama Pandya who caused to construct this temple. So, this village also served both as a Jain centre as well as a Saivite centre.

**Alagarmalai:** Alagar means a handsome person. His hill abode is called as Alagarmalai. This Vaisnavite God, one among the Hindu trinity, every year in the month of Chithirai full moon day (April - May) is usually brought. This is a great festival celebrated every year by the Maduraites with great pomp and joy.

But this hill has another side of the history also. This hill also served as an important Jain centre where 13 Tamil Bhrami inscriptions were found engraved. One of these inscriptions mentions the name Mathirai, the ancient city. Here a number of Jain beds were carved for the stay of Jain monks within the natural cavern. Merchants of various trades were named in these inscriptions who might have liberally donated to make these stone beds. Salt merchant, sugar merchant, iron merchant, cloth merchant and one goldsmith are mentioned in these records. A Jain nun is also found mentioned in these records. These inscriptions are dated to 1 BCE. The famous Jain saint Acchananthi also has stayed at this hill and caused to carve out a Mahavira image during 9 - 10<sup>th</sup> BCE.

The present Alagar temple situated below this hill is also an ancient one, which was mentioned in early Sangam literature and the great epic Silapathikaram. It was sanctified by six Vaisnavite saints (Alvars). Thirumalai Nayak has constructed one beautiful theatre hall in this place. Painting gallery is also one among the notable places. It is also considered as one of the six sacred abodes of Lord Muruga (Palamudirsolai - Arupadaividu).

So this place is also an important centre of religious harmony and cultural synthesis.

**Mangulam:** This village lies at a 20km distance to the north of Madurai in the highway that leads from Madurai to Melur. Very near to this village another small hamlet called Meenakshipuram in which an ancient adobe of Jains is seen in the hill called Ovamalai or Kalugumalai. There are five caves and more than sixty stone beds in which six early Tamil Bhrami inscriptions are found. These are the earlier records discovered during 1886 and dated back to 3<sup>rd</sup> BCE. Two records in this place contain the

name of Nedumchezhiyan, a famous Pandya king who ruled Madurai during the sangam period.

In all these six caves stone beds were scooped for the stay of Jain monks. Not only Kings, their officials and relatives but also members of merchant community people donated for the making of stone beds. Nigama, a mercantile guild served in the nearby village Vellaripatty is referred to in one of these inscriptions. These beds were made for the stay of a monk Gani Nanda Sri Kuvan and his disciples. Not only Brahmi inscriptions but traces of pre-historic paintings are also noticed in this hill. One brick structure might have been a meditation hall is also unearthed during the excavation conducted by the state dept of Archaeology in the year 2007.

**Thirupparankundram:** This hill lies 8km south of Madurai city on Madurai – Virudhunagar Main Road. Even though this hill is considered one among the six sacred abodes of Lord Muruga, it has vestiges of Jainism which attest to its existence since sangam period (2C BCE). On the western end of this small hill there is a small cleavage in which rock beds are scooped out for the stay of Jain mendicants. Three early Tamil Brahmi inscriptions are engraved on the beds of this cave. One record mentions that an individual from Erukkattur, who was a grahasta of cyclone was caused to be carved these beds. Another record mentions the name Anthuvan who donated for the carvings of the beds. One more mutilated record mentions the existence of a spring.

Besides these early beds and records one cave temple dedicated to Jaina Thirthankara was also chiseled out on the southern side of the rock. It was dated to 8-9 CCE and it is named as Umaiyandar koil. This temple was later converted into a Siva temple during 13 CE and the Jaina Thirthankara image was changed as Arthnarisiva.

More than this, two more bas relief sculptures of Jaina Thirthankara were also carved here one at the foot of the hill behind the present day Palaniyandavar temple and another one at the top of the hill. Below these images two vatteluthu inscriptions also are carved which reveal the connection with the Jain schools situated at Kurandi, a village at a distance of 20 kms from Madurai on Aruppukkotai road.

Nowadays this hill is very famous for the worship of Muruga (Karthikaya). In the sangam Literature Akananuru, this hill is mentioned as an abode of Lord Muruga. But the present day temple is a cave temple carved during 773 CE by one military General Sathan Ganapathi. Before the creation of this cave temple this place was worshipped as a temple of Siva Thirupparankundram udaiyar and it was sung by Devaram hymnist Gnanasampantha and Thiru Navukkarasa, during 7<sup>th</sup> CCE. After that the cave was carved. Now in this cave Siva and Vishnu are housed in the opposite cells, Vinayaka, Durga and Muruga are carved in the niches.

Above the hill there is a Darha in the name of Sikkanthar sha, who ruled Madurai for some years during 14 CCE.

**Samanamalai (Jain Hill):** The name of the hill itself explains its association with Jainism. This hill lies in the village Kilakuyilkudi, 15km west of Madurai near Nagamalai Pudukkotai village. In this village three important Jain vestiges are found which speak about the existence and flourishing nature of Jainism during 9 -10 CCE.

It is a picturesque place with a lotus pond at the foot of the hill Samanamalai. At the top of the hill one natural water spring is seen and galaxy of Jain images are carved on the face of the rock. This place is called as Pechchipallam. Pechchi is a term denoting a demi goddess found in the villages of TamilNadu. Pechchi is a

corrupted form of Yakshi, the attendant lady deity of Jainism. In this rock, sculptures of Mahavira, Parsvanatha and Bagubali (Gomatisvara) are carved. Below every sculpture inscriptions are also engraved which give the details of the individuals who caused to carve these images. These inscriptions also give the particulars regarding the existence of a residential school at this place and the names of the persons who managed the school and the students studied here. It had a contact with the other school which functioned at Kurandi near Aviyur located at Madurai- Aruppukottai main road. Names of some visiting professors from Mulasanga of Sravana bela gola are also engraved on the top most terrace of the hill.

A structural temple of Jains called Madevi Perumpalli was constructed at this hill by a Pandya king Parantaka Viranarayana (860 – 905 CCE). Only the stone base is remaining here with an inscription belonging to the same king's period.

From this record we come to know the name of the village as Uyirkudi and the hill as Thiruuruvagam. The name is changed as Amirthaparakramanallur. Details of some lands nearby the village donated to this Jain temple is also known from this record.

**Settipodavu:** Behind the Jain hill just 200mt away one more cave is found which is now named by the locals as settipodavu. Here on the face of the rock there is a huge image of Mahavira is carved as bas-relief. This image looks like a chettiyar (moneylender community of TamilNadu) and so the name of the cave (Podavu - hole) is called Settipodavu. Inside the cave there are five sculptures. Among them three represent Mahavira, one Ambikayakshi and another one Korrariya. The last one is very interestingly shown as a fighting scene. The lady figure (Korrariya yakshi) is seated on a lion and

ferociously fighting with a man who is seated on an elephant. Below these sculptures are inscriptions which give the names of the persons who carved these images.

Around Madurai eight Jain hills existed and it is mentioned as an ancient verse. Among this eight Samanamalai (Thiru uruvagam) is also very important hill center of Jainism during 8 -10 CCE.

**Muthupatti:** It is another village just behind the Samanamalai two km away. This hill is variously named as Karadipattimalai, Perumalmai etc. This hill consists of three ancient Tamil Brahmi records and Jain Beds. These records reveal the name of the persons who carved out these beds. Two persons one called Musiri Kodan and Nagaperur Anthai had carved one bed. Another inscription mentions one Saiyalan from Vinudaiyur had made these beds. One more damaged record gives the other name Thidi Kaththan who also carved these carvings. All these three records are dated to 1 CCE. The nearby village names viz Vandiyur, Nagamalai, Thidiyan maybe identified from these three records.

Besides these rock beds and early Brahmi inscriptions, two Thirthankara images are also carved out as bas relief on the face of the boulder. Below these sculptures inscriptions are also engraved which reveal the name of the village as Amirthaparakramanallur and the Jain ascetics who caused to carve these images. These records and figures maybe assigned to 9 – 10CCE.

**Kongarpuliyankulam:** This village lies at Madurai – Theni main road at 20km distance. Here on the western end of the Nagamalai range one natural cavern is found in which more than sixty rock beds are carved for the stay of Jain ascetics. Three early Tamil Brahmi inscriptions are also engraved on the base of the rock. Dripledges are carved to drain the rain water

away from the cave. Below this dipledge three inscriptions are seen. Upasan Uparuvan, Sera Athan, Paganur Pethaan Pitan, three individuals had carved out these rock beds. These records are dated to 1C BCE. Just 20mts west of these beds on the face of other side of the rock a Mahavira image is carved out which maybe assigned to 9 -10 CCE. Below this image a small inscription also seen from which we come to know the Saint Accanandhi has caused to carve this image. Thus this Jain centre existed since 1C BCE to 10 CCE is well attested by three records.

**Varicciyur:** This village lies at a 15km distance from Madurai on Sivaganga road. Very near to this village there is a small hillock called

Uthayagiri. On the brow of this hill (Subramanya hill) there are three Tamil Bhrami inscriptions. One record reveals the name Ilanathan who carved this bed. Another two are somewhat damaged records which also reveal the same message. These three records belong to 2C BCE. In this cave more than 20 beds are carved out for Jains.

Very near to this cave one early Pandya cave temple also seen which is dedicated to Siva and named as Uthayagirisvara temple. Just behind this cave another cave temple is also found with a Siva linga in the Sanctum Sanctorum and is called Asthagirisvara. These two caves are the works of early Pandyas dated to 8CCE

**Script by: Dr.C.Santhalingam**

