

The Rise and Fall of Jainism in Tamil Nadu - An Exploration (The Sangam age to Medieval period)

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Preface

The Indian subcontinent is a vast landmass that encompasses numerous languages, ethnicities, cultures, civilizations, and religions. Among these, religion is the last to have emerged, but it has become the most important aspect of human life. Religion has been divided into various sects, and today, there are over 4000 religions worldwide. In the Indian subcontinent alone, there are more than 20 religions. In India, major religions like Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism thrive. However, only a few religions have originated and flourished in India. These include **Vedic religion, Saivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism, Kaumaram, Ganapathyam, Sauram** (all of which are now part of Hinduism), **Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism**. In the 17th century the British colonial powers grouped various sects under the umbrella term "Hindu," resulting in the loss of individual identities for sects like Saivism and Vaishnavism. Although Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism originated in India, each has its unique characteristics.

The Numerous rituals, unintelligible Vedic practices, sacrificial rites, extravagant ceremonies, unnecessary expenses, and denial of rights to women in Hinduism led to widespread discontent, prompting people to seek alternative religions. From 1st BCE to 3rd BCE, Buddhist monks and Jain ascetics propagated their religions, gaining support from many, including monarchs. For instance, after the Kalinga War, Emperor Ashoka embraced Buddhism and established several monuments, sending his children to various countries for religious propagation."

Like Chandragupta Maurya, who embraced Jainism in his later years and attained salvation in the Jain tradition of Sallekhana at Shravanabelagola in near Bangalore, these religions gained prominence in India to the extent that kings followed them. However, in Tamil Nadu, there was no significant change in religious attitudes. Most people followed the Six Tamil religions of **Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism, Kaumaram, Ganapathyam, and Sauram** according to researcher Tho.Paramasivam. On examining when Jainism and Buddhism were introduced in Tamil Nadu, it is found that these religions emerged in the 6th century BCE. However, they

flourished in Tamil Nadu only during the Kalabhra period (3rd CE), which is considered a dark age in Tamil history. Although both religions entered Tamil Nadu together, Buddhism did not gain as much acceptance as Jainism did in Tamil Nadu. Jainism gained prominence from the 2nd century CE, especially among the Kalabhra, Pallava, and Pandya rulers (3rd-CE to 6th-CE), who followed it rigorously. Despite entering Tamil Nadu in the 2nd century CE, Jainism could not sustain itself for long. The opposition from Vedic religionists was more severe than that faced by other religions. Ideological conflicts and religious disputes arose. The Bhakti movement, which emerged in Tamil Nadu, revitalized Vedic religion, and the efforts of religious propagandists to spread it among the people affected Jainism severely.

The fact that Tamil Nadu Emperors (Pandya, Pallava, Cholas), who followed Vedic religion, embraced Jainism after its arrival and the creation of many literary works by Jains, as well as the patronage of Jain monks by emperors, irritated the Vedic religious leaders. Moreover, the elaborate rituals, extravagant worship, and unintelligible mantras in Vedic religion alienated people from the original deity worship. As a result, Jainism spread widely among the people as an alternative to Vedic religion. Although there were two Jain sects, **Digambara** and **Svetambara**, in Tamil Nadu, the Svetambara Jains interacted with the people and integrated themselves into everyday life, making it easier for them to propagate their religion. Hence, the Digambara Jains were more prominent in Tamil Nadu. This study explores how Jains flourished in Tamil Nadu, their status at that time, and the consequences they faced due to oppositions."

What is Jainism? Who is a Jain's?

During the 5th BCE to when Hinduism was deeply rooted in India, two different sects emerged, advocating the principle of non-violence. This was long before Jesus Christ, who preached love and peace to the world, was born¹. In India, Jainism and Buddhism, which revered non-violence, emerged as two separate religions. The history of these two great religions is mentioned in the ancient Indian history book published by Cambridge University². The scholars who wrote the book, after thorough research and consultation, have written the following truth: "Jainism is older than Buddhism." Many researchers have accepted this ideology that Jainism emerged in India before Buddhism. Mahavira, who founded Jainism, is well-known. According to historical records, Mahavira's real name was Vardhamana, which means "one who brings prosperity"³. However, some scholars disagree with this view, as Mahavira is considered the 24th Tirthankara (spiritual leader), and there were 23 Tirthankaras before him. Therefore, Jainism must have existed before Mahavira.

Mahavira Vardhamana, who lived from 599 BCE to 527 BCE, did not found Jainism. Parshvanatha (23rd Tirthankara), who lived 250 years before Mahavira, is mentioned in many historical books⁴. This is accepted by everyone. So, who founded Jainism? Was it Mahavira,

¹இராகவன். பா , சமணம் ஓர் அறிமுகம் , 2008 , DIGITAL EDITION PUBLISHED BY BUKPET- Page - 1

² சக்கரவர்த்தி நயினார் . A, சமணமும் - சைவமும் ,1946 முத்தமிழ் நிலையம் சென்னை -1 Page-7

³ இராகவன். பா , சமணம் ஓர் அறிமுகம் , 2008 page 5

⁴ சக்கரவர்த்தி நயினார் . A, சமணமும் - சைவமும் ,1946 – Page 8

Parshvanatha, or Rishabha Deva, the first Tirthankara? There is confusion regarding this. However, Jainism was not created by the Tirthankaras. The principles, ideologies, and philosophies of Jainism were established from Rishabha Deva to Mahavira. Later, Mahavira's followers were called Jains or Shramanas. Some people say that Jains and Shramanas are different, but this is not true. The word "Jain" comes from the Sanskrit word⁵. "Ji," and "Shramana" means "one who tolerates pleasure and pain equally" or "one who has no friends or enemies". In Tamil Nadu, the term "Jain" is commonly used. In Tamil Nadu, most Jains were Digambaras (sky-clad, meaning naked). Therefore, Tamils called them "Ammanars" (naked ones), which later became "Jains." In the Tevaram, Sambandar also refers to Jains as "Ammanar" or "Amanar"⁶. Mayilai. Seeni.Venkatasamy says that the word "Shramana"⁷ comes from Sanskrit and refers to both Buddhists and Jains, but later it referred only to Jains⁸.

Jainism and its principles

According to Jainism, are based on the teachings of the Tirthankaras, who preached peace and non-violence as the central philosophy. There are 24 Tirthankaras in Jainism, and their names, times, and heights can be known through Jain literature. Each of the 24 Tirthankaras has a unique vehicle and can be identified accordingly.

The names, heights, and lifespans of the 24 Tirthankaras are as follows:

01.	Vrishabhanatha	500 cubits	84 lakh purva years
02.	Ajitanatha	450 cubits	71 lakh purva years
03.	Sambhavanatha	400 cubits	60 lakh purva years
04.	Abhinandanatha	350 cubits	50 lakh purva years
05.	Sumatinatha	300 cubits	40 lakh purva years
06.	Padmaprabha	250 cubits	30 lakh purva years
07.	Suparshvanatha	200 cubits	20 lakh purva years
08.	Chandraprabha	150 cubits	10 lakh purva years
09.	Pushpadanta	100 cubits	2 lakh purva years
10.	Sheetalanatha	90 cubits	1 lakh purva years
11.	Shreyansanatha	80 cubits	80 lakh years
12.	Vasupujya	70 cubits	72 lakh years
13.	Vimalanatha	60 cubits	60 lakh years
14.	Anantanatha	50 cubits	30 lakh years
15.	Dharmanatha	45 cubits	10 lakh years
16.	Shantinatha	40 cubits	1 lakh years

⁵ Rajeshwari.M,Amirthavalli.Lt.A ,A Study on Jainism History, Philosophy and Traditions in Tamilnadu, International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities, April 2021, Page 1

⁶ வேதத்தா.வி.பி. பேராசிரியர் , சமணம்,பௌத்தம், அன்னைத் தெரசா மகளிர் பல்கலைக்கழகம் – கொடைக்கானல், Page 11

⁷ வேங்கடசாமி. சீனி. மயிலை, சமணமும் தமிழும் , சைவ சித்தாந்த நூற்பதிப்புக் கழகம்– 1959 – Page 1

⁸ கார்த்திகேயன். ஆ , பழந்தமிழில் சமண சமய சொற்கள் வருகை-வளர்ச்சி-ஒடுக்கம் , KEETRU.COM ,2023 – Page 1

17.	Kundunatha	35 cubits	95,000 years
18.	Aranatha	30 cubits	84,000 years
19.	Mallinatha	25 cubits,	55,000 years
20.	Munisuvrata	20 cubits	30,000 years
21.	Naminatha	15 cubits	10,000 years
22.	Neminatha	10 cubits	1,000 years
23.	Parshvanatha	9 cubits	100 years
24.	Mahavira	7 cubits	72 years ⁹

The teachings of these 24 Tirthankaras are considered the highest philosophies of Jainism. Jain philosophy is based on the research of six substances, including living and non-living things, and the conclusions drawn from it¹⁰. Moreover, the term Tirthankara means one who helps to cross the ocean of birth. These Tirthankaras show the way for humans to attain liberation (Moksha). Jains do not claim the existence of a God beyond their comprehension¹¹. The principles of Jainism are based on the teachings of these 24 Tirthankaras, who preached peace, non-violence, and self-control. The ultimate goal of Jainism is to attain liberation from the cycle of birth and death, and to achieve this, one must follow the path shown by the Tirthankaras. Jainism is almost similar to atheism. Instead, it identifies 18 types of flaws and considers those who have overcome these flaws, understood Dharma, and preached it as "Aapthan" or "Jinan" (God)¹². The 18 flaws listed by Jainism include "hunger, thirst, fear, desire, anger, intoxication, thought, old age, disease, death, sweat, renounced, pride, attachment, sleep, and sorrow."

Apart from this, Professor Tho. Paramasivam says that Jains have a soul theory. Additionally, Jains practice four types of meditation to attain liberation:

1. Artha Dhyana - Liberation from sleep
2. Raudra Dhyana - Liberation from activities like killing, stealing, and deception
3. Dharma Dhyana - Contemplation of the righteous path set by ancestors
4. Shukla Dhyana - Realization of the true nature of the soul

Jainism emphasizes the importance of overcoming these flaws and achieving liberation through meditation and self-realization¹³.

The Arrival of Jainism in Tamil Nadu

⁹ வேங்கடசாமி. சீனி. மயிலை, **சமணமும் தமிழும்**, சைவ சித்தாந்த நூற்பதிப்புக் கழகம் – 1959 – Page 3 – 4.

¹⁰ பூபாலன்.திரு.து. B.E., **சமண சித்தாந்த நுழைவாயில்**, ஸ்ரீ அகலங்கர் அநகாந்த மன்றம், சென்னை-2021. Page 12

¹¹ இராகவன். பா , **சமணம் ஓர் அறிமுகம்** , 2008 , DIGITAL EDITION PUBLISHED BY BUKPET – Page 3

¹² மாணிக்க சாஸ்திரி. டாக்டர் T.A, **சமணத்தின் காலமும் சமய மாறுதல்களும்**, செஞ்சி- Page 10

¹³ பூபாலன்.திரு.து. B.E., **சமண சித்தாந்த நுழைவாயில்**, ஸ்ரீ அகலங்கர் அநகாந்த மன்றம், சென்னை – 2021 Page 18

There are varying opinions about the arrival of Jainism in Tamil Nadu. According to Mayilai. Seeni. Vengadasamy Nattar, Jainism arrived in Tamil Nadu during the Mahabharata period, specifically during the time of Kannan (Krishna)¹⁴. The 22nd Tirthankara, Neminathaswami, was a close relative of Kannan, and it is believed that Kannan will be reborn as the 24th Tirthankara to establish the Jain religion. Prof.Sakkaravarthi also supports this view, stating that according to Jain tradition, Neminathaswami, mentioned in the Vedas as Arishthanemi he was the brother of Kannan. Jains believe that Kannan will be reborn as a Tirthankara in the future¹⁵. Additionally, **Chandragupta Maurya**, who ruled India from 322 to 298 BCE, adopted Jainism and renounced his throne to become a Jain monk¹⁶. He traveled to South India and died at Shravanabelagola in Karnataka. This event may have led to the arrival of many Jain monks in South India.

After Mahavira's death, his disciples, including Gautama Indra, Bhooti, and Sudharma, became prominent Jain leaders¹⁷. Sudharma's disciple Sambuswami, and later, Vinitadeva, Nandimitra, and Aparasiddha, played important roles in spreading Jainism. During the time of Pattirabhagu, a Jain monk, Jainism entered Tamil Nadu, according to Mayilai. Seeni. Vengadasamy Nattar. Pattirabhagu, a Jain monk, was not only the leader of the Jain community (317-297 BCE) but also the spiritual guru of Emperor Chandragupta Maurya¹⁸. When **Pattirabhagu** predicted a 12-year famine in the Magadha region, he informed Chandragupta, who then accompanied Pattirabhagu and 12,000 Jain monks to South India. They settled in **Mysore**, and Pattirabhagu sent his disciple, **Vishaka Muni**, to spread Jainism in the Pandya and Chola regions. This event marks the beginning of Jainism in Tamil Nadu.

The Jain texts, **Pragat Katha Kosam**, and **Rajavali**, also confirm this. Additionally, many Jain inscriptions from the 3rd century BCE have been found in Madurai region, Tamil Nadu. These inscriptions, discovered in **Mangulam** and **Azhagar Malai**, date back to the 1st and 2nd centuries BCE and are associated with Jainism¹⁹. A Brahmi inscription found in the Nellur district of Andhra Pradesh, on the hill of **Malakonda**, reads "**Aruvahali (ku) Kulattu Nanda Setti**, son of **Sri Veeri**, built this cave"²⁰. This inscription, dated to the 3rd century BCE, confirms the presence of Jainism in the region. Similar Brahmi inscriptions have been found in Kongu region, dating back to the 3rd century BCE²¹. Later, Jainism spread to the Pandya and Chola regions, and then to the Tondai

¹⁴ வேங்கடசாமி. சீனி. மயிலை, **சமணமும் தமிழும்** , சைவ சித்தாந்த நூற்பதிப்புக் கழகம் – 1959-Page 37

¹⁵ சக்கரவர்த்தி நயினார் . A, **சமணமும் - சைவமும்** ,1946 – Page 8

¹⁶ வெங்கடேசன். க, **பண்டைய கால இந்தியா வரலாறு** , வர்த்தமானன் பதிப்பகம் -2018 Page 58

¹⁷ வேங்கடசாமி. சீனி. மயிலை, **சமணமும் தமிழும்** , சைவ சித்தாந்த நூற்பதிப்புக் கழகம் – 1959 Page 35

¹⁸ செங்குட்டுவன்.கோ, **சமணர் கழுவேற்றம்** ,கிழக்கு பதிப்பகம் -2017 Page 29 to 30

¹⁹ வேங்கடசாமி. சீனி. மயிலை, **சமணமும் தமிழும்** , சைவ சித்தாந்த நூற்பதிப்புக் கழகம் – 1959

²⁰No.531 Of 1937-38 Annual Rep. South Indian Epi.1938

²¹ ஏகாம்பரநாதன்.ஏ, **கல்வெட்டில் சமணம்** , ஜைன இளையோர் மன்றம்-2012 Page 1

region. Inscriptions from the 2nd and 3rd centuries BCE have been found in these regions, supporting the spread of Jainism²².

The **Mahavamsa**, a Sri Lankan text, also mentions the presence of Jainism in Sri Lanka during the reign of King **Pandukabhaya** (377-307 BCE). He built schools for Jain monks in Anuradhapura. These findings confirm that Jainism arrived in Tamil Nadu in the 3rd century BCE, during the time of Chandragupta Maurya²³. Therefore, there is evidence that Jainism existed in Sri Lanka in the 3rd century BCE. However, if Jainism spread from India to Sri Lanka, it must have come through Tamil Nadu. It is not possible to travel by ship from North India, cross the sea, and reach Sri Lanka, as their religious doctrine opposes such long sea travel. Hence, they must have crossed over to Sri Lanka from the shallow coastal area of Tamil Nadu, specifically from the Mannar Gulf region, which is within a day's journey to Sri Lanka. Therefore, it can be inferred that Jainism spread in Tamil Nadu through the Jains who arrived in Tamil Nadu at that time.

The Spread and Support of Jainism in Tamil Nadu

There are various opinions about the spread of Jainism in Tamil Nadu and the time period during which it occurred. However, most scholars agree that Jainism arrived in Tamil Nadu between 3rd century BCE and 2nd century CE. Although Jainism entered Tamil Nadu in the 3rd century BCE, it gained significant influence only during the Sangam period, which is also known as the "**Sangam Maruvia Kalam**". During this time, Buddhism, which shares similar principles with Jainism, also took root in Tamil Nadu. Jainism faced many challenges in establishing itself in Tamil Nadu. One of the main challenges was the presence of Vedic religions, which had been prevalent in the region for over a thousand years. Jainism had to compete with these established religions, which made it difficult for the new religion to gain acceptance. Another challenge faced by Jainism was the presence of Buddhism, which shared similar principles and was also gaining popularity in Tamil Nadu. This led to frequent religious conflicts between Jainism and Buddhism. "Buddhist temples were converted into Jain temples. Furthermore, in the 8th century CE, Jains in Kanchi Kama Kottam engaged in religious debates with Buddhists and defeated them, leading to the exile of Buddhists to Sri Lanka²⁴. Apart from this, frequent religious conflicts occurred between Jains and Buddhists in Tamil Nadu, with Jains emerging victorious"²⁵. Despite these challenges, Jainism managed to establish itself in Tamil Nadu.

Jains also rejected the Vedic concept of caste-based hierarchy and accepted anyone who followed their teachings, regardless of their birth²⁶. This is evident from the Jain text "**Arunugalachempu**", which states,

“பறையன் மகனெனினும் காட்சி யுடையான்
இறைவன் எனஉணரற் பாற்று”²⁷

²² சம்பகலக்குமி.ஆர்.டாக்டர், ‘சமணம்’ ஆய்வுத்தேன் – Page 24

²³ மகாவம்சம் X, பக்-97,98,99

²⁴ வேங்கடசாமி. சீனி. மயிலை, தமிழும் பௌத்தமும் – Page 28

²⁵ பிள்ளை.கே.கே.டாக்டர், தமிழக வரலாறு மக்களும் பண்பாடும் – Page 12

²⁶ அறவாணன் க. ப , சமணம் வளர்த்த தமிழ் – இலக்கணம்
,சபாநாயகம் அச்சகம், சிதம்பரம் , 1993 Page 12

²⁷ அருங்கல செம்பு – சமண நூல் -□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□ 37.-
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In this verse, found in the **Narkatchi Adikaram** section of the **Arungalachembu** Jain text, it is mentioned that even if someone is from the Paraiyar community, a marginalized group in Tamilnadu, if they possess good faith, they can attain the greatness of God. This highlights that Jains have consistently emphasized the importance of a caste-free and egalitarian society, where social and religious hierarchies do not exist. And Jains made four types of donations to establish themselves in Tamil Nadu.

Jains have been known for their charitable activities, including:

1. Annadhanam - Food donation
2. Abhayadhanam - Shelter donation
3. Oushadhadhanam - Medical donation
4. Shastradhanam - Educational donation

These charitable activities are mentioned in Jain texts and have been practiced by Jains in Tamil Nadu.

They provided food for the poor and shelter for those who sought refuge. Places where Jains provided shelter were called "**Anjinan Pugazhithalam**"²⁸. A Jain inscription found in Jambai village, Tirukovilur taluk, South Arcot district, mentions that the village was previously known as **Veerarajendra Puram** and had a Jain temple called **Kandaraditha Perum Palli**²⁹. The inscription also states that the temple's deity, Neminathaswami, had ordered that those seeking shelter should be protected. Jains also provided medical charity, as evident from their Tamil works on medicine, such as "**Elaadi**", "**Thirikadugam**", and "**Sirupanchamoolam**". Jains revolutionized education in Tamil Nadu by promoting education in the local language³⁰. They established schools and taught students in Tamil, unlike the prevailing practice of teaching in Sanskrit. This was a significant departure from the Vedic tradition, which restricted education to certain castes.

"The Jains were the ones who introduced schools in this land. The Digambara monks invited children to their dwellings to impart education. The students sat in the Jain school premises within the monks' caves and learned. Since the children sat in the school premises and learned, the educational institutions came to be known as schools (பள்ளிக்கூடம்). Even today, the term 'school' (பள்ளிக்கூடம்) in common usage has its origins in the Jain schools"³¹. Jains also promoted education for women. They did not discriminate between men and women and had female ascetics, known as "**Kurathis**", who were involved in educational activities. Many Jain inscriptions mention female ascetics and educators, such as "**Kanakala Kurathi**" and "**Pattini Kurathiyadi**". Over 50 Jain schools existed in Tamil Nadu, where both male and female ascetics taught. The Jains' emphasis on education in the local language and their inclusion of women in educational activities were significant contributions to Tamil society."

²⁸ வேங்கடசாமி. சீனி. மயிலை, **சமணமும் தமிழும்**, சைவ சித்தாந்த நூற்பதிப்புக் கழகம்- 1959 page-42

²⁹ 448 of 1937-38, Ep.Rep.1937-38, Page-89

³⁰ அறவாணன் க. ப, **சமணம் வளர்த்த தமிழ் - இலக்கணம்**, சபாநாயகம் அச்சகம், சிதம்பரம், 1993 page 10-11

³¹ பரமசிவம்.தொ.பேராசிரியர், **பண்பாட்டு அசைவுகள்**, சரண் புக்ஸ், சென்னை-2022 page 100-101

Jains have also been involved in educational activities, including the establishment of schools and colleges. They have also been known for their medical donations, including the establishment of hospitals and dispensaries. Jains have also been involved in shelter donation, providing shelter to those in need. They have also been known for their food donation, providing food to those who are hungry. Jains have also been involved in educational donation, providing education to those who are in need. They have established schools and colleges, and have also been involved in the development of educational materials. Jains have also been known for their medical donations, including the establishment of hospitals and dispensaries. They have also been involved in the development of medical materials, including medicines and medical equipment.

Jains have also been involved in shelter donation, providing shelter to those in need. They have established orphanages and old age homes, and have also been involved in the development of shelter materials, including clothing and blankets. In addition to these charitable activities, Jains have also been involved in the development of Tamil language and literature. They have established schools and colleges, and have also been involved in the development of educational materials. Jains have also been known for their involvement in the development of Tamil culture, including music, dance, and art. They have established cultural organizations, and have also been involved in the development of cultural materials, including musical instruments and art supplies.

Overall, Jains have been involved in a wide range of charitable activities, including educational, medical, shelter, and food donations. They have also been involved in the development of Tamil language, literature, and culture. Jains lived in large numbers in cities, rural areas, and mountain caves³². They established many schools and wrote numerous rare books and grammatical texts in Tamil, thereby strengthening their relationship with the general public. This effort made it easy for Jainism to spread among the people. Although Jains were foreigners in terms of language and culture, they were able to create a profound and beautiful grammar in Tamil, which suggests that they were not strangers to the Tamil language³³. Initially, Jainism gained influence among the people, and later, it received support from the rulers. The Kalabhra, Pandya, and Pallava dynasties, as well as those belonging to the royal family, admired and supported Jainism. In the 7th century, the Pandya king Maravarman, who ruled Madurai, and the Pallava king Mahendravarman, who ruled Kanchi, followed Jainism³⁴.

As Jainism received royal patronage, the general public also began to adopt it, fearing that they would not receive royal support if they did not follow Jainism. Mahendravarman Pallava expressed Jain ideas through his book "**Mathavilasa Prahasanam**". Additionally, Kundavai, the sister of the first Rajaraja Chola, built Jain temples in various places, including Thirumalai. Many royal families not only admired Jainism but also provided to assistance it. Several kings donated "**Palli Sandam**" to promote Jainism³⁵. Palli Sandam refers to the donations given by the government to Jain temples, monasteries, and charitable institutions. Thus, Jainism established itself in Tamil Nadu with the support of the general public and the rulers.

Jainism in Tamil Nadu faced opposition and consequences

³² பிள்ளை.கே.கே.டாக்டர், **தமிழக வரலாறு மக்களும் பண்பாடும்** page 54

³³ அருணாசலம்.மு, **தமிழ் இலக்கிய வரலாறு 13-ம் நூற்றாண்டு**, 1990 page 362

³⁴ வேங்கடராமையா.கா.ம, **இலக்கியக் கேணி** page 1

³⁵ வர்த்தமான சாகர சுவாமிகள்,ஸ்ரீ 108, **தமிழ்நாடு விஜயம்**, ஸ்ரீ ஆசாரிய நிர்மல ஸாகர சங்கம், பாரி அச்சகம்-சென்னை -1978 page 12

To the extent that it spread with massive public support and royal patronage. Jainism, which flourished until the 3rd century CE, faced a massive decline during the 6th century CE, the period of the Tamil devotional movement. On one hand, Jainism struggled to counter the significant ideological impact of the religious preachers who spread the devotional movement. On the other hand, Jainism and Jain monks followed practices and beliefs that were unacceptable to the general public, leading to widespread resentment against Jains. Moreover, the royal dynasties that once supported Jainism began to adopt Vedic Hinduism under the influence of the devotional movement, which further weakened Jainism. The same rulers who once supported Jainism and built Jain schools in Tamil Nadu later destroyed Jain symbols and killed many Jains. Jainism faced opposition from multiple quarters after the 6th century BCE and was also subject to Vedic Hindu counter-propaganda³⁶. The educational methods taught by Jains were criticized for making Tamils forget their traditional values and become weak. Poet Kuzhandai notes that Jains' teachings in the name of non-violence led to a loss of linguistic, ethnic, and national pride³⁷.

Jains performed many unacceptable actions due to their religious beliefs. They would pluck the hair on their heads, shave their heads, wear a tuft of hair, and insert a nail into their earlobes. They would eat food standing up, holding it in both hands. They wouldn't brush their teeth, allowing plaque to form, and wouldn't bathe, leaving their bodies unclean³⁸. Additionally, they would tie a cloth around their eyes, and as a result, flies would constantly buzz around them, as mentioned in the Tevaram. Jains had a practice called "Lochana" where they would pluck all the hair on their heads and bodies, including their eyebrows, using their hands. Thirunavukkarasar, who converted from Jainism to Saivism, wrote about his experiences as a Jain in the Tevaram.

**குண்டனாய்த் தலைபறித்துக் குவிமுலையார்
நகைநாணா துழிதர்வேனைப் பண்டமாப்
படுத்தென்னைப் பாறலையிற்³⁹**

The appearance of Jains, who followed extreme ascetic practices, alienated them from the people and led to widespread resentment. Another reason for the decline of Jainism was their emphasis on rigorous asceticism. Jainism and Buddhism introduced the concept of asceticism to Tamil Nadu, which was initially met with resistance. Tamil people found it difficult to accept the idea of renouncing worldly life, including marriage, as advocated by Jainism and Buddhism⁴⁰. The Sangam literature, which reflects Tamil values, emphasizes the importance of love, marriage, and family life. Thiruvalluvar, who is considered one of the earliest Tamil thinkers to advocate asceticism, did not reject worldly life entirely. However, his ideas on asceticism were not fully embraced by the Tamil people. The rejection of Jainism's emphasis on asceticism and the acceptance of family life as advocated by Saivism contributed to the decline of Jainism and the rise of Saivism. The practice of nudity among some Jain sects was unacceptable to the Tamil people. The Digambara Jains, who wore no clothes, were forced to live in isolation, away from

³⁶ அறவாணன் க. ப , சமணம் வளர்த்த தமிழ் – இலக்கணம் ,சபாநாயகம் அச்சகம், சிதம்பரம் , 1993 page 1

³⁷ குழந்தை.புலவர், கொங்கு நாடு page 12

³⁸ கோவை கிழார் , கொங்கு நாடும் சமணமும் page 18

³⁹ திருநாவுக்கரசர் , தேவாரம் , நான்காம் திருமுறை poem 4.005.4

⁴⁰ பரமசிவம்.தொ.பேராசிரியர், பண்பாட்டு அசைவுகள், சரண் புகல் , சென்னை-2022 page 102-104-105

society⁴¹. Additionally, they were only allowed to eat when hungry and had to beg for food, which further alienated them from the people. Thirunavukkarasar, who converted from Jainism to Saivism, lamented the treatment of naked Jains, who were ridiculed and shunned by society.

**சமணநீசர் சொல்லே கேட்டுக்
காவிசேர் கண்மடவார்க்க் கண்டோடிக்
கதவடைக்கும் கள்வ னேன்றன்.....⁴²**

In addition to the factors mentioned earlier, the Pallava and Pandya kings, who had converted from Vedic Hinduism to Jainism, later returned to Vedic Hinduism. Notably, Thirunavukkarasar converted Mahendravarman Pallava from Jainism to Saivism⁴³. Similarly, Sambandar converted Maravarman, the Pandya king of Madurai, from Jainism to Vedic Hinduism⁴⁴. The support of these kings for Jainism and their subsequent return to Vedic Hinduism led to a significant decline in Jainism in the region. Initially, Jainism advocated for the equality of all individuals, but later, it adopted a new form of untouchability, where they considered others as impure. This led to a decline in Jainism's popularity among the Tamil people.

"Jainism, which initially emerged as an alternative to the Vedic religion that emphasized untouchability, treated everyone with respect and equality. However, ironically, Jainism later adopted a new form of untouchability. They considered it impure to even see or hear people from other religions⁴⁵. Manonmaniyam T.P. Meenakshi Sundaranar writes in his book "Sambandham Samanarum" (Relationship with Jains): "Those who feared touching ants and insects, later developed a mindset that shunned people who were different from them, saying 'don't see, don't hear' and ostracized them⁴⁶. This behavior contradicts their initial inclusive approach and ultimately led to the Tamils' dislike towards Jains."

The Bhakti movement, which emerged during this period, emphasized devotion and reform within Vedic Hinduism. The resurgence of Vedic Hinduism with new reforms made it difficult for Jainism to survive. Frequent clashes between Jains and Saivites occurred throughout Tamil Nadu, with both groups engaging in counter-propaganda. In Madurai, Sambandar cured the fever of Pandya king Maravarman through the power of his sacred ash. The king, pleased with this, converted to Saivism. The Jains, who were defeated in a debate with Sambandar, were punished by the king by being paraded on a donkey. This event is mentioned in the Periyapuram and Takayaganap Parani.

**கோதைவேல் தென்னன்தான் கூடல் குலநகரில்
வாதி அமணர் வலி தொலையக் - காதலால்
புணர் கெழுவு செம்புனல் ஆறுஓடப் பொருதவரை
வன் கழுவில் தைத்த மறையோன்⁴⁷**

⁴¹ பரமசிவம்.தொ.பேராசிரியர், **பண்பாட்டு அசைவுகள்**, சரண் புக்ஸ் , சென்னை-2022

⁴² திருநாவுக்கரசர் , **தேவாரம்** , நான்காம் திருமுறை poem 4.055.8

⁴³ மன்னர்மன்னன்.இரா, **பல்லவர் வரலாறு**,பயிற்று பதிப்பகம் ,2023 page 42

⁴⁴ இராசமாணிக்கனார்.மா **பாண்டியர் வரலாறு**, சரண் புக்ஸ்,2020 page 36

⁴⁵ கோவை கிழார் , **கொங்கு நாடும் சமணமும்** page 22

⁴⁶ மீனாட்சி சுந்தரனார்.தெ.பொ.மனோன்மனியம், **சம்பந்தரும் சமணமும்** page 55

⁴⁷ நம்பியாண்டார் நம்பி, **திருஞானசம்பந்தர் திருவந்தாதி** page 122

"As Sambandar, who removed the darkness of ignorance, shines with the beauty of knowledge, and as the noble one who destroyed the false knowledge of the Jains, he is praised by Nambiyandar Nambi in the Tiruvandadhi as:

வேதப் பகைவர் தம் உடம்பு
வீங்கத் தூங்கும் வெங்கழுவிற் றுக்கு
ஏதப் படுமெண் பெருங்குன்றத்து
எல்லா அசோகும்' எனவே.
மண்ணா உடம்பு தம்குருதி
மண்ணக் கழுவின் மிசைவைத்தார்
எண்ணாயிரவர்க்கு எளியவரே
நாற்பத் தெண்ணா யிரவரே⁴⁸

The book "Takayaganap Parani" by **Ottakoothar** mentions the humiliation of Jains being paraded on donkeys. Thus, Jainism faced countless conflicts in Tamil Nadu from the 6th century CE onwards. Later, the rituals, fasts, ascetic practices, nudity, and other beliefs adopted by Jains in later periods repelled the people. Due to these various reasons, Jainism declined in Tamil Nadu. However, it's not entirely accurate to say that Jainism was completely eradicated. Even today, Jains continue to live in many parts of Tamil Nadu.

Conclusion

Jainism and Buddhism, which preached love and non-violence, emerged in India long before the birth of Jesus Christ. Jainism, which originated in the 6th century BCE, reached its peak during Mahavira's time. Later, it spread to South India through the efforts of Patrapagharā Muni and other Jain monks. Despite facing numerous challenges and opposition from Vedic Hinduism, Jainism established itself in Tamil Nadu. Initially, Jainism attracted people due to its novel approach and charitable activities. However, over time, Jainism also developed rigid practices, such as asceticism and nudity, which alienated the Tamil people. Scholars have expressed various opinions about Jainism, but according to Professor Arunasalam, Jains may have been outsiders in terms of ethnicity, language, and geography, but they were not outsiders to the Tamil language. In fact, they made significant contributions to Tamil literature, producing numerous works that are still revered today. The educational efforts of Jains helped eliminate social divisions in education. However, Jainism eventually declined due to its own rigid practices and loss of royal patronage. Although Jain monks still exist in Tamil Nadu, Jainism has lost its former glory. Nevertheless, the literary legacy left by Jains will endure through time.

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