

Executive Summary of the UGC Minor Research Project
on
ORIGIN AND DECLINE OF JAINISM IN SOUTH TAMILNADU: A
CRITICAL STUDY

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Jainism wielded considerable influence in the Tamil country during the Post *Sangam* Period. When Jainism was first introduced in the Tamil country it was merely considered as a system of thought and was received with open arms. For the first time the Jains preached the principle of equality of man and taught that asceticism could be practised by all irrespective of caste, creed and community. They were the first to teach and practice the principle of Ahimsa. The nature of Jain contribution to literature and its impact on Tamil society can be best studied and understood against the background of the historical processes which transformed Tamil society.

The religion of Jainism was acceptable to the people of the region or the material background of the time which made the spread of Jainism in ancient Tamilagam. A detailed analysis of the Jain centres of South Tamilnadu Region was also done, looking first into the physical geography of the centers and the cultural geography. This includes the centers like Anaimalai in Maadurai, Kalugu malai in Tutocin, Chithral Monument at Kanyakumari district and the famous centres of Jainism. One of the major aspects of Tamil culture, wherein Jain influence has been predominant and most permanent is Tamil literature. Various factors contributed to its declining popularity in India. It had to compete hard with both Hinduism and Buddhism. Every reason was generated within the soil not from outside. Mostly religious rivalries between the Bakthi saints and the Jains accelerated the process of decline. The study reveals that the Jains had left a significant legacy from north to south and east to west in Tamilnadu- and these developments were more materialistic in nature than religious. The important findings of the study are as follows

SCOPE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Buddhism and Jainism are had emerged as revolutionary religions opposing the Vedic religion. Thanks to Gaudhama Buddha and Varthamana Mahavira, these two religions emerged and established a strong hold in north India. As far as ancient Tamilagam was concerned, these two religions would have spread in the soil during the post Sangam period. Gradually Jainism established a strong hold in Tamilagam comparing with Buddhism. Most of the Jain monuments located in South Tamilnadu. They are the standing testimony to prove that Jainism developed well by challenging the stiff opposition of Hinuism. Most of the studies have failed to realize the significance of this study. This fact is formed the main hypothesis of the project and seriously established by suitable primary and secondary sources. Critically examines findings of the reasons of growth and decline of Jainism in South Tamilnadu as discussed below

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study deals with the history of origin and decline of Jainism in South Tamilnadu and seeks to investigate

- a) to examine how the north Indian boern Jainism entered into Tamilnadu in general and southern areas in particular;
- b) to comprehend the gradual growth of Jainism under various empires;
- c) to want extent Tamil secular literature enriched due to the legacy of the Jains ;
- d) to find the problems that existed inside the Jainism and from the other beliefs ;
- e) how the well established religion was disappeared from the soil of Southern parts of Taminadu.

Major Findings of the Study

The discussions in the first part of this study proved the fact that the existing works related to the Jain centres in Kerala are not sufficient to describe the socio, religious and context of the Jains in the region and also the neglect of these pluralities was not quiet accidental but as part of an ideology. In other words, the survey of the historical writings on Jainism in Southern Tamilnadu and other references shows the fact that when the earlier writings completely negated the subject, the recent works took a more relevant stand towards the

topic; but the problem is that, no attempts have been made to evaluate these writings and its problems.

The study further found out the answer to these questions as to how the religion of Jainism was acceptable to the people of the region or the material background of the time which made the spread of Jainism in ancient Tamilagam. At the end of the first part, the study looks out the South Tamilnadu migration of Jainism and its geographical back ground.

The discussions also undoubtedly proved the fact that the Jain migration took place long before the Brahmin migration by examining the Sangam literature and related works. One of the major aspects of Tamil culture, wherein Jain influence has been predominant and most permanent is Tamil literature. Jain contribution to Tamil literature has been so significant that it has not only created for the Jains a special niche in the history of Tamil literature, but has also established basic norms in various aspects of the study of the Tamil language and linguistics. Jain scholars have enriched the Tamil language, composed elegant poems, written works on grammar and prosody, compiled lexicons and presented lofty ideals of ethics in pithy verses. Tamil language and literature would have been further enriched if religious hatred and strategies kept away.

A detailed analysis of the Jain centres of South Tamilnadu Region was also done, looking first into the physical geography of the centers and the cultural geography. This includes the centers like Anaimalai in Maadurai, Kalugu malai in Tutocin, Chithral Monument at Kanyakumari district and the famous centres of Jainism.

Next is the analysis regarding the decline of Jainism in South Tamilnadu. Various factors contributed to its declining popularity in India. It had to compete hard with both Hinduism and Buddhism. At one time Buddhism, and afterwards Hinduism, became the most popular religion in India. Some of the major general causes responsible for the decline of Jainism in India were lack of royal patronage, lack of efforts, Severity of Jainism, unintelligible Philosophy, factionalism in Jainism ,Spread of Buddhism, Role of Hindu preachers. But it is found that the story of the decline of Jainism in Tamilnadu was happened in different way. There were some unique factors behind the the disintegration.

Every reason was generated within the soil not from outside. Mostly religious rivalries between the Bakthi saints and the Jains accelerated the process of decline. Such a religious enmity echoed all political, cultural, literary and religious life of the Jains in particular. Stiff challenges of Bakthi movement and the conversion of great Pallava and Pandiya emperors to Saivism ultimately led to the decline in Southern parts of Tamil land.

According to study, there were several possibilities for this tragedy to take place. Impalement of eight thousand Jain monks may be considered as a major act of religious feud. The violence caused by the Bhakti saints against Jains and Buddhists could not be underestimated. Whatever the cause may be this transfixion at the stakes, it is a kind of genocide. Genocide like warfare is a collective or societal rather than individual form of violence.

To sum up, the study reveals that the Jains had left a significant legacy from north to south and east to west in Tamilnadu- and these developments were more materialistic in nature than religious. Being non-vedic sect it also left-out their own contribution and influenced religious and material life of the people in the region in connection with its physical and cultural geography. But most of the works on Tamilnadu history from ancient times to modern period neglects this part. While majority of the scholars concentrate on the Bakthi movements in Tamilnadu, in effect they ignore the history of Jainism. This was only an attempt to locate the plurality of Tamilnadu history and culture through the study of the Jaina centres in South Taminadu.

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Recommendations

The study highlights some recommendations for the enhancement of the further studies. The major suggestions in this regard are the following.

Conversion of Jain shrines into Hindu temple was a common in those days not only in Tamilnadu but Kerala also. There were several Jain shrines and temples in medieval Kerala and some of them continue to exist even today as Hindu temples. As a recommendation, this aspect needs fresh insight by further research.

Jainism contributed much to the development of socio - economic and religious atmosphere in Tamilnadu from its very origin, including some revolutionary changes. The importance given to yakshis in Jainism can be seen from the fact that there is a yakshi for each of the 24 tirthankaras. With the decline of Jainism, yakshis have become folk deities again. The history of the yakshi cult in India is a fascinating one. The worship of “Isakki Amman” (isakki originating from the word yakshi) is popular to this day in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu. The earliest reference to yakshi in Tamil is found in the Jaina epic Silappadhikaram, which talks of “Poongkann Iyakki”, that is, a yakshi with eyes soft as flowers. The Hinduisation and Dalithisation of some deities should be studied in the light of archaeological evidences of Jainism

In Tamilnadu, the Jains and Buddhists were pushed out by the Saivaites (as well as by the Vaishnavites) through various means including impalement, reconversion, etc., The Jains almost disappeared from the Tamil country except in some small pockets. Thus the present study brings a scope for the study of the history of religious violence in Tamilnadu.

Most of literatures of early Jain sects have disappeared in its original form. Probably due to the passage of time or through desecration of and vandalism in the monasteries, innumerable monuments were destroyed or being converted into Hindu temples. These historical mistakes need to be brought to the public Diaspora for rethinking and retrospection of the history of Jainism.