

Historical Importance of Arittapatti – A Study

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1. Introduction

Arittapatti is one of the places in Madurai that is unexplored to its potential. But, this place in one of the rural areas of the district, boasts of a rock cut temple, more than 2,000-year-old Jain beds, various stone inscriptions belonging to different ages, perennial water source atop the hill with a small dam and the sprawling Anaikondan tank situated between the scenic Kalugumalai and Perumal Reserve Forest. Historians and archaeological experts, who turn up for a rare visit are welcomed by the scenic flower cultivation at the site. A few devotees visit the rock cut temple for darshan now and then. The village is neglected by both the Department of Archaeology and the Department of Tourism to bring the historic spot into the limelight, which is situated just 20 kilometers away from the city and four kilometers away from the diversion on Madurai-Trichy four way lanes. There is not even a single signboard nor there any information about the site on the main road.

According to A Ravichandran, vice-president of Arittapatti talked about the historic significance of Anaikondan Tank which was constructed in the early century during the Pandian ruler Sundarapandian Thevar, who constructed it in remembrance of another Pandya ruler called Anaimelkondan. It was revealed during a research carried out recently.¹ There is no protection for the historic site which craves for maintenance. Some of the villagers unmindful of the historical details do not give due respect to the place. They even use the Jain bed as a temporary shelter for their cattle, these villagers showing the cattle dung found inside the bed at the foothills.

M Tamildasan of Naanal Nanbargal who carried out an exploration at the historic spot, he spelt out that the research activities carried out in the area in 1971 and 2013 unearthed several inscriptions. There are sculptures and 2,000-year-old paintings which are very rare to find in any other part of the state. It is said to be the only place in Madurai to carry out agriculture activities from the hillock. Unfortunately, there is very little information on the area and signboards leading to the place.

Hence this paper focuses on the Historical Importance of Arittapatti, it is an Epigraphical and Archaeological site, is famous for its Jain Monuments, Early Pandya Cave Temple, and Tamil Brahmi Inscriptions are such a colourful pigments still remain which attract the attention of the scholars. They deserve for the study of Socio-Cultural and Architectural significance of this region during the early period.

2. Objectives

- To focus the unexplored area of Arittapatti, and its Valuable importance of Jain Beds and Inscriptions.
- To know the historical specimen of Siva Temple and its Architectural and Sculptural significance.

- To study the Socio-Cultural life of the people of this region during the 7th and 8th century A.D.

I. Epigraphical Importance

Tamil Brahmi Inscription found near Madurai recently has brought to light the fact that not only Pandyas and Cheras but the Chiefs of the Coastal region in this state also patronised Jainism in the early period. It is a remarkable evidence of history of early Tamils politics, culture and language. The inscription was found engraved in a cave of a hillock, where Jain monks stayed and preached their faith. In the same place another Brahmi Inscription discovered by some scholars in 1971.

Since this new inscription is carved with very thin strokes and illegible. It had not attracted the attention of the historians so far. The inscription, engraved as a single line with 33 letters and running for 3.10 metres, reads as follows:⁴

"Ilanji vel mapparavan makan emayavan nalmuzhaukai kotupithavan." It means, "Emayavan, son of Mapparavan, chief of Ilanji, has caused the carving of this auspicious cave." It has been written in the Bhattiprolu (Andhra Pradesh) casket inscription method and so all short consonants have long strokes, as the orthography of this inscription resembles that of Mangulam inscriptions (also in Madurai district), its date may be assigned to 3rd century B.C., 'Ilanji' denotes the name of a place, while 'Vel' means chieftain. Ilanji Vel might have been a ruler of a small territory around Ilanji. There is also a village near Courtallam with the same name. Emayavan, chief of Ilanji, was the son of Mapparavan. 'Paravar' denotes the people of coastal region settled in southern districts of Tamil Nadu. 'Muzhaukai' means the cave in which the inscription is found and the prefix, 'nal' auspiciousness.

The same word, 'Nalmuzhaukai' occurs in Varichiyur Brahmi Inscription also. The previous inscription found at Arittapatti also bears the word 'Muzhagai', which also means cave. One of the Sangam works, 'Madurai Kanchi' refers to the Paravar defeated by Padyan Nedunchezhan. Even the Velvikudi copper plate speaks of the defeat suffered by Tenparavar at the hands of a Pandya king. All these evidences make clear that the Paravars were the chiefs of the coastal region and they ruled their areas as subordinates of the Pandyas of the Sangam age. The previously discovered Brahmi inscription at Arittapatti also mentions about a chief from Nelveli (now Tirunelveli region). The inscription throws light on the proximity the chiefs of Nelveli to the Pandyas of Madurai in the Sangam age.

On the western side of the village Arittapatti at one kilometre distance, a hill range runs to south north orientation, which is named as Kalinjamalai by the locals. At the eastern side of this hill lies a small hamlet Ilamai nayakipuram by

name. Very near to this a small natural cave is found in which Jain beds were carved. Below the brow-cut of this cave an early Tamil Brahmi inscription was discovered in 1971. The date of this record is assigned to 2nd century B.C. by I.Mahadeva according to the similarity of the script of Mankulam records. Fortunately one more Tamil Brahmi inscription was discovered by the further probing of this site by the officers of Archaeology department, Tamilnadu Government. This record lies above the brow cut of the cave just 6 feet distance to east of the location of the previous record.

The first inscription mentions that certain chief Cilivan Athinan Veliyan by name, a native of Nelveli may be identified with the present Thirunelveli. The word Cilivan may be the corrupted form of Celiyan, the family epithet of Sangam Pandyas. Another word Mulakai means the large cavern of this place.¹ The second inscription also gives almost the same message but the name of the place and individual are different. Ilanci the place name found in this record may be identified with the village found near Tenkasi in Tirunelveli district. The donar is named as **Emayavan**, son of Elamper athan. Both these records are assigned to 3to2 century B.C.

Due to the rise of Bhakthi Movement during 7th century A.D, well-flourished Jainism had to face a little set back. Again it was rejuvenated by the relentless efforts of Jain crusaders like **Accanathi** throughout Pandya country. **Accanathi** has visited almost all early Jain centres of Pandya region and caused to carve images of **Tiruthankaras** near the caves where Brahmi inscriptions are seen. In this mission he had visited Arittapatti also and arranged to carve a Mahavira sculpture on the rock just a 10feet distance from the inscribed Jain cave. This image Mahavira is seated in the Arthapariyanka asana. His head is adorned with triple umberalla. Two chouris are also seen one on each side. The figure is slightly covered with lamps are fairly preserved.⁸ From this record that the name of the hill is mentioned as Thiruppinaiyanmalai, and the name of the village is given as Pathirikkudi. The image was carved by the monk **Accanathi** on behalf of Karanathar of Porkodu. According to the palaeography, this record is dated to 9centry A.D. the sculpture is also assigned to the same date.

II. Pandya Cave Temple

On the western side of the hill Kalinjamalai one beautiful cave temple dedicated to Siva, is carved out during early Pandya period. This cave is very simple with a small square central shrine and a rectangular front mandapas. Sivalinga is carved out with circular Avudaiyar in the natural rock itself. The front mandapas has two pillars and pilasters, which are chiselled in the usual early Pandya style with square base and Tharanka potikas. On the outer side of the temple two niches are cut one on each side with bas-relief sculptures of vinayaka and Lakulisa siva respectively. The structure of the cave temple and the style of the sculptures help us to assign the temple to 8 century A.D. Lakulisa sculpture found here is a rare specimen in Tamilnadu, the counterpart of this could be seen at Devarmalai in Pudukkottai District and Porur in Coimbatore district.

In the personal visit on recent survey a ruined Siva temple was located with a later Pandya inscription. This inscription

belongs to the eleventh year of Jatavarman Vikkiramapandya of 13th century A.D. It records a sale deed of land at a village **Devan Embal** by one merchant **Athichcha Devan** alias Siruma Nadalvan, who was a resident of Pathirikkudi alias Siruma Nadalvan, who was a resident of Pathirikkudi alias Ainnurruvapperuntheru. Ainnuruvar was a popular mercantile group, which spread all over south since 8th century A.D. Peruntheru means a regular market of that particular place. Ancient name of Arittapatti is also mentioned as Pathirikkudi. The merchant Athichcha Devan referred to in this record might be a powerful person with a nadalvan title. This village Arittapatti might have close commercial contact with nearby centres too. The Vellarai Nigama a mercantile centre referred to in Mangulam Brahmi inscription is located just 4km distance from Arittapatti. Alagarmalai, where different kinds of traders assembled and functioned during 3rd to 2nd century B.C is not so far off from Arittapatti. All these Jain as well as trade centres lay on the ancient trade route connected with Pandya and Chola capitals Madurai, and Uraiyur respectively.

Thus this Siva temple is a fine example of the early Pandya rock-cut temple architecture. This simple but beautiful edifice, which belongs to the 7th – 8th century CE, has a Garbhagriha and a front **mandapa**. Now the local people call this temple as **Idaichchi mandapam**. The Siva linga of this temple has been chiseled in the centre of the same rock. The bas-relief sculptures of the Vinayaka and Siva as Lagulisa adorn the two niches of the exterior wall of the front Mandapa. This is one among the rare Lagulisa sculptures found in Tamil Nadu. Their Architectural and Sculptural skill explicated their talent and it is very useful to the modern artist. It gives the real History of the rulers and the people of the early period.

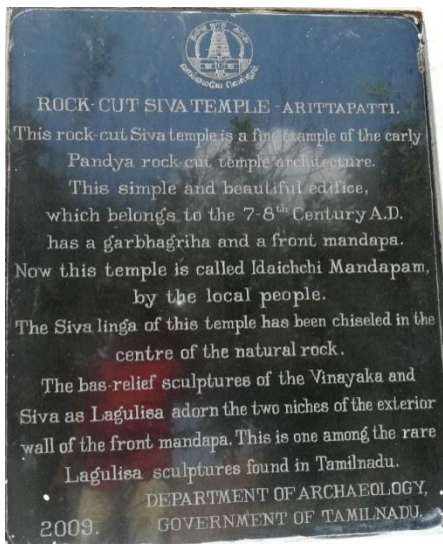
III. Copper Plates of Nayak Period

At Arittapatti, a copper plate which was noticed during the later period of Nayaks. It is in the possession of Vekappunaththan, a resident of Arittapatti village. The plate describes an incident took place during Thirumalai Nayak period. Vekappunaththan, a resident of Kalikottai was appointed as the spy by Chetty Dalavay (a Military chief) to look after the border and inform him about the invasion if any with an alarm by beating a drum. He should always be on a high rock shelter, which would be provided with an iron ladder to watch the border. On one occasion due to his timely alarm the army raid of Thirumalai Nayak was defeat. After analysing the reason for the failure in his attempt Thirumalai Nayak tactically made inactive the spy Vekappunaththan by bribery. During the next raid Vekappunaththan kept silent and the nearby villages were looted by Nayaks army. Later on, Chetty Dalavay came to know the treacherous act of Vekappunaththan and punished him by taking away the iron ladder from the rock. So, vekappunaththan finally died. The sons and wife of the deceased Vekappunaththan approached Thirumalai Nayak and appealed for their life. Thirumalai Nayak granted them certain privileges to collect some money and gains from the nearby villages for their livelihood. This grant is mentioned in this Copper plate. This plate is now in the possession of the person who has the same name Vekappunaththan. Though this plate belongs to a later period it gives information about the history of the Nayaks.

From these above mentioned details the commercial and cultural significance of Arittapatti village are explicated. Thus

this village had a continuous religious and trade activities for more than two thousand years. This type of study of each and

village will be helpful to learn the local history of the particular region.



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