



KALLIL TEMPLE AND THE JAIN INFLUENCE IN KERALA

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Abstract

Many Jain temples in Kerala were converted to Hindu temples due to certain social and political changes. The Kallil Jain temple, for example, became the Kallil Bhagavathy temple as a result of these modifications. Jainism in Kerala began to decline early in the ninth century A.D. and had completely vanished by the sixteenth century. The Saivite and Vaishnavite movements started to influence people in the seventh century, contributing to the weakening of Jainism's foundation in Kerala. Despite this, Jainism persisted in the region until nearly the sixteenth century. Logan has highlighted how several Hindu temples and Muslim mosques in Kerala have adopted Jain architectural designs. The continued worship of Nagas, or snakes, is evidence of Jainism's lasting influence in Kerala. The ancient religion of Jainism included several customs, and Bhagavathy, a Hindu goddess, is thought to have connections to Jain statues. Despite the decline of Jainism in Kerala, some Jain families still reside in various parts of the state. Notably, some of the last remaining Jain households can be found in the Wayanad and Kasaragod regions. Additionally, Gujarati businessmen who follow the Jain faith now reside in the commercial hubs of Alleppey and Mattancherry.

Key Words: Structural temples, Jain influence, Cave temple, Religious Harmony

Introduction

In ancient times, Kerala saw the settlement of various cultural groups, which contributed to its rich and diverse heritage. Among these, Jainism played a significant role. The architectural and cultural impacts of Jain and Buddhist traditions are evident in many temples across the state. For instance, historians opine that many current Bhagavathy temples are believed to have originally been Jain shrines. The historical spread of Jainism in Kerala is supported by the discovery of Jain temples and relics in regions like Wayanad, Palakkad, Thiruvananthapuram, and Ernakulam. Wayanad, in particular, was a major center of Jainism, likely influenced by migrations from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Relics of this cultural heritage, such as images of Parsvanatha and Mahavira found in Kasaragod, highlight the region's importance as an early Jain hub. Moreover, places like Thirucharanam and the village of Chitral in Travancore serve as living memories of the Jain community's historical presence .

Ancient literature provides vital insights into the influence of Jainism in Kerala. For example the Tamil Epic ' Silappadhikaram' of Elango Adigal has

influence of Jainism . Elango Adigal was a Jain prince and his love to Jainism encouraged him to write the renowned Tamil epic. Such as, the literary texts of that period presented so many Jain-influenced narratives. Along with literature the presence of Jain centers and temples across the land, such as those in Wayanad and Palakkad also becomes evidence to the influence of Jainism in Kerala. Additionally, a extensive compilation of Jain artifacts, including historical images, sculptures, idols, and inscriptions, offers substantial evidence of the religion's impact on Kerala's heritage.

Historians assume that when Jainism failed, many ancient Jain temples have been transformed into Hindu temples. Though Jainism has largely moved out from Kerala, it has left an indelible mark on the cultural landscape. A leading example is the Kallil Temple in the Ernakulam district. This temple is one of the few remaining Jain structures which showcase Jain architectural heritage in Kerala. The name 'Ernakulam' derives from 'Erayanarkulam,' signifying Lord Shiva's residence, historically known as Rishinagakulam. The district also features megalithic monuments such as dolmens and rock-cut caves. The

political history of Ernakulam, or Cochin, began with the Chera dynasty during the Sangam period, which ruled over extensive areas of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Kallil Temple is located in Perumbavoor, a semi-urban area that serves as the administrative center of Kunnathunad Taluk in Ernakulam district. The name 'Perumbavoor' can be traced back to two possible origins. One interpretation comes from the words 'perumpa' (meaning big) and 'oor' (meaning place), thus translating to 'big village.' Another version suggests that 'perumbabu' means python and 'oor' means place, alluding to the area's past as a dense forest teeming with pythons, thereby earning the name 'land of pythons.'

Perumbavoor is historically renowned for its structured temples. Literature from the eighth century AD highlights the existence of structured temples in Kerala. Structured temples believed to have been constructed in the early ninth century AD under the reigns of Kulashekhar Varman and Rajashekhar Varman. Ancient Kerala often referred to temples as Tali, Mukkalvattam, and Koyil. Notable temples from this era include the Kutalmanikkam

Bharata Temple at Irinjalakuda, the Trikkulasekharapuram Krishna Temple, and the Mahadeva Temple at Tiruvanjikkulam near Kodungallur. This era can be termed the 'age of temple movement' due to the remarkable development in temple construction observed by researchers during this period. It was with the rise of the South Indian Bhakti movement, temple culture developed in Kerala. The architectural styles from the east coast of South India also influenced this region, leading to significant advancements in temple construction from the ninth century onwards. This movement gained further momentum with the support of the Kochi rulers after the reign of the Kulashekharas.

Kallil temple

The well-known Kallil Temple at Perumbavoor is an ancient, historically significant structure. In Malayalam, the word 'Kallil' means 'in stone,' reflecting its nature as a cave temple. This temple is one of Kerala's oldest Jain temples. It is situated on a mound within a 28-acre forest, far from the populated areas of Methala. The Kerala Archaeological Department has designated it as a protected monument, recognizing its cultural and historical value. It is believed that the Kallil Temple was

originally a Jain shrine before becoming a Hindu temple, likely in the ninth century A.D. During Kerala's early medieval period, Kallil Temple was regarded as a significant Jain center, renowned for its distinctive architectural design. The temple is currently owned by the Kallil Pisharody family, with the properties belonging to the temple also owned by the Pisharodies of Methala.

The Structure of the Temple

The Kallil Temple's cave was naturally created when two large rocks collided; one end of one rock rests on another rock in a highly sloping position, while the other end nearly touches the ground. The cave measures 60 square feet and has a height of ten feet. A portrait of Kaliyamardana is chiseled into the southern wall's exterior. The small town of Methala is located 13 kilometers southeast of Perumbavoor and is bordered by two small hills, with Kallil Temple perched on the second hill. The garbhagriha of the Kallil Temple houses three idols: two crafted from panchaloha representing Tirthankaras, and the third idol is of Padmavati Devi. The principal deity of the temple, a panchaloha idol, can reach up to 2.5 meters in height. Behind the main deity is a Jain yakshi

idol, which is not visible to the general audience and can only be seen by the temple pujari, making its identification challenging.

Most historians believe that the idol is of Padmavati Devi. Behind the 2.5-meter-tall idol of the Goddess is a Tirthankara idol, carved into a rock that forms part of the back wall. The Tirthankara is depicted in a yogic pose with vitargamudra, representing intense meditation, with straight shoulders and a lion, unmistakably Mahavira's totem animal. The mukuda of this idol is clearly visible at the top. Mahavira and the Goddess are placed close together, facing east. Scholars identify the idol as Mahavira, while some other historians believe it to be Parsvanatha.

These interpretations are made by scholars based on inferences drawn from circumstantial evidence. On the roof of the Kallil Temple, there are half-relief carvings of Tirthankaras with damaged features. This depiction of the Tirthankaras lacks many typical Jain characteristics, such as the lanchana, the triple umbrella, the Ashoka tree, the sasanadevdas, and swastikas. The figures' protruding abdomens and short, thick hands make it difficult to identify them as Tirthankaras. Hence, historians opine that it is an image of Mahavira.

Kerala historians suggest that the Kallil Temple was originally a Jain shrine, housing idols of Vardhamana Mahavira, Parsvanatha, and Padmavati Devi. They assume that the current idol of Bhagavathy was initially that of Padmavati Devi, a Jain goddess. It is believed that the temple transitioned from a Jain shrine to a Hindu temple in the ninth century, hence the name Bhagavathy Temple.

However, devotees in Kerala and the people of Perumbavoor believe the prominent idol at Kallil Temple represents Lord Brahma. The modern temple observes two significant vows: the broom vow and the stone vow. Unlike most Hindu temples, the Bhagavathy idol is situated in a cave, restricting free movement around the premises. Consequently, locals bow to the enormous stone as a symbol of devotion to the deity. Over time, the idols of Mahavira and Parsvanatha were transformed into those of Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu.

Eventually, several maintenances have been made to the Kallil Temple. Stone slabs were used to create a garbhagriha (sanctum sanctorum) by separating the area where the idols were installed. In front of this garbhagriha stands a very old balipita. The southern wall's exterior

features a sculptured portrait of Kalimardana. The Mukhamandapam structure is a recent addition, along with the structures on each side of it. On a remote rock two meters from the Kallil Temple, there is an unfinished carving of a Tirthankara in the padmasana position, a detail that has not been previously reported. Fifty meters north of the main cave temple, another cave features tunnels formed by the joining of three stones, providing enough room for a person to stand upright. On the right side of this cave, there is a supposed representation of Kubera Yaksha, who is depicted with ornamented hair and a potbelly and is revered locally as Lord Shiva. Within the temple, stones are engraved with letters, and a yantra imprint can be seen on another rock in the cave's northern region. These features highlight the temple's historical and architectural significance, reflecting its Jain origins.

Despite differing opinions, the remnants left by Jains, such as inscriptions, idols, and images, have been instrumental in reconstructing the long history of Jainism in Kerala. These artifacts, uncovered in various locations across Kerala, are invaluable for tracing the activities of Jains in the region. It is believed that Jainism reached Kerala

from Karnataka. Literary sources indicate that early Chera kings granted royal patronage to Jainism in Thamilakam. Jainism had a significant influence on the society and culture of the area. The Jain symbols and images in the Kallil Temple continue to represent this Jain legacy. The images of Parsvanatha, Mahavira, and Padmavati Devi serve as evidence that the temple once functioned as a Jain shrine.

Conclusion

Many Jain and Buddhist temples in Kerala were converted to Hindu temples due to certain social and political changes. The Kallil Jain temple, for example, became the Kallil Bhagavathy temple as a result of these modifications. Jainism in Kerala began to decline early in the ninth century A.D. and had completely vanished by the sixteenth century. The Saivite and Vaishnavite movements started to influence people in the seventh century, contributing to the weakening of Jainism's foundation in Kerala. Despite this, Jainism persisted in the region until nearly the sixteenth century. To conclude, many Hindu temples and Muslim mosques in Kerala have adopted Jain architectural designs. The continued worship of Nagas, or snakes, is evidence of Jainism's lasting influence in Kerala.

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