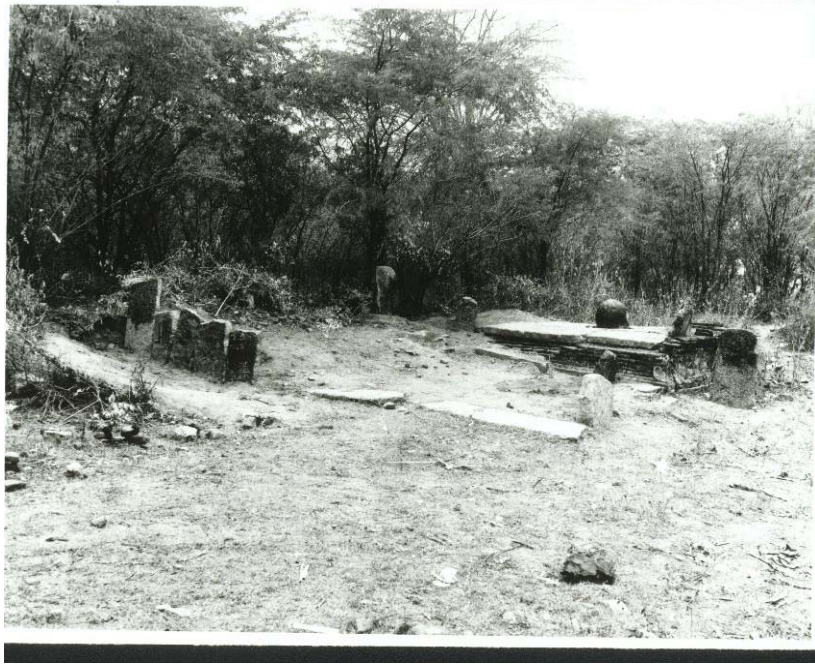


New Jaina inscriptions from Kūvaṇūr, Tamilnadu, India*

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A most unusual group of early Chola Jain inscriptions has been discovered at Kūvaṇūr, a small village in Tirukkoyilur taluq of Villupuram district.¹ These are found in the backyard of Mr. Paramasiva Nainar. (His ancestors were originally Jains but now converted into Saivites). Three slabs containing inscriptions were planted on either side of a basement made of bricks (local people call it a Śiva temple since a cylindrical stone was planted in the middle of the basement (Picture 1).



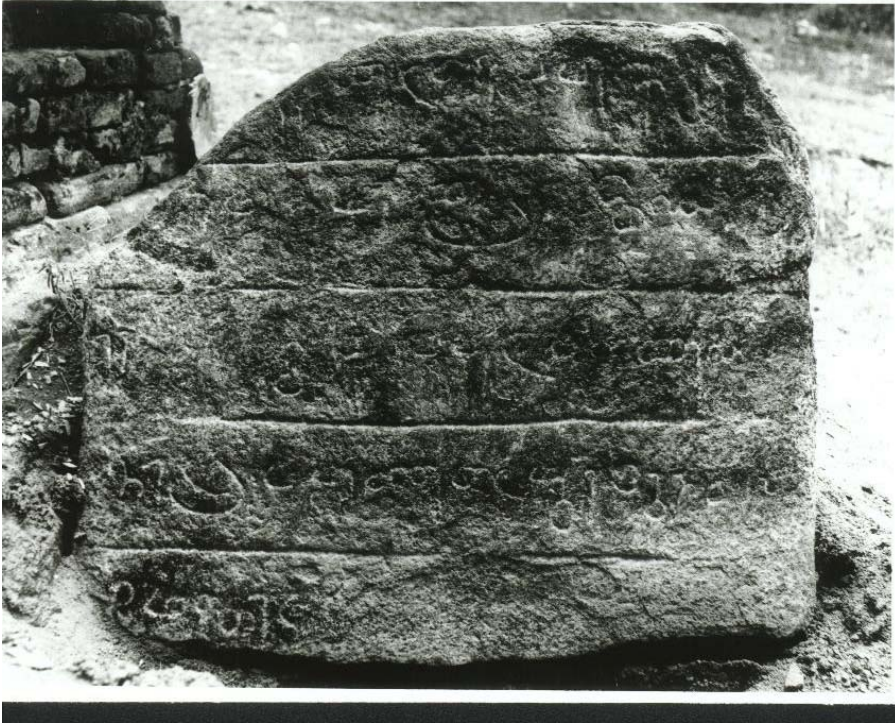
Picture 1

The slab planted on the left side of the basement contains an incomplete five-line inscription (Picture 2). Each line is underlined. The upper and lower portions of the slab were broken. The inscription begins with a phrase "*..ṇṭa kō Parakēcari*" which can be identified with the usual *meykkīrtti* "real fame" (i.e. the exploits of the king) which begins with *Maturai koṇṭa Parakēcari*- "the king

* I thank sincerely Dr. Y. Subbarayalu, Tamil University, Tanjavur, for his kind help in reading these inscriptions. It is in fact by him that they were accidentally found.

¹ See report in THE HINDU, September 10, 2002 under the title "Rare Chola inscriptions found near Villupuram".

Parakēcari (title) who conquered Madurai". However the words *Maturai* and *ko-* are missing in the inscription. This is identified as that of the early Chola king Parāntaka I who ruled between 906 and 955 A.D. Since the inscription mentions his regnal year as 15, this inscription is datable to 921 A.D.



[Picture 2]

Text

1. ..ṅṭa kopparakecari.....
2. rmarṅku yāṅṭu (Pa)tiṅaiñ-
3. cā (vatu).....muṅaiṅpāṭiṅ pāṅṭaiyūr-
4. nāṅṭup pāṅṭaiyūr iruntu vā-
5. lum totṭa.....

Translation

lines 1-3: In the 15th regnal year of king Parakēcari

lines 3-5: Totṭa who lives in Pāṅṭaiyūr in Pāṅṭaiyūr nāṅṭu of (Tiru) muṅaiṅpāṭi.....

Explanation

(Tiru) Muṅaiṅpāṭi and Pāṅṭaiyūr Nāṅṭu are the old political divisions of the Chola country of which Muṅaiṅpāṭi is the larger unit. Pāṅṭaiyūr is the village name which could not be traced now. Since the inscription is incomplete the full message could not be traced.

The slabs planted on the right side of the basement, the writing of which is similar to the dated slab, contain unique information about the customs and beliefs of the Jains in Tamilnadu. This is noticed for the first time in Tamilnadu (perhaps even in India)

One slab contains the following inscription inscribed on both sides.

[Picture 3]



[Picture 4]



Text

side I (Picture 3)

1.Svasti Śri
2. [ō]m k[mri]m
3. ṭm bhram
4. kuppai pira-
5. mā[ṇi] [ka]...
6. kai pāṇi

side II (Picture 4)

1. Shrim jraum
2. riṃ Srīḥ
3. paṇṇiraṇṭu
4. nōṛru naṭṭa
5. pāṇittari

Translation side I

line 1: Hail Prosperity!

lines 2-3: Mantras

lines 4-6: The hand mode....kuppai Piramāṇi



Translation side II

lines 1-2: Mantras

lines 3-5: The stone showing the mode which is planted after following vow for twelve (days?)

Explanation (Side I): The first two lines contain syllables of mantras. These were common to all religions following Tantric practices. Lines 4-5 mention about a *Pramāṇi*, a Sanskrit word meaning "one who is well versed in *śāstras*". *Kuppai* may be referring to his native village. The syllable /ka/ which is noticeable may be the initial syllable of the proper name of the one who is well versed in *śāstras*. The compound noun *kaippāṇi* is interesting. It means "hand mode". A compound noun *pāṇi mukam* occurs in the Tamil Jain epic *Cīvācācintāmaṇi* which is datable to the 10th century A.D. This compound noun is used in connection with the story that a dog after listening to the *Pañca mantra-s* uttered by Cīvakaṇ, the hero of the epic, got enlightened and attained the form of a Deva.² According to Nacciṇārkkīniyar this noun means the *gati* "mode" by which way the souls travel after they got released from their bodies, which are referred to in (the Jain) *Paramāgama*.³ Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer who edited this Tamil epic has given the following remarks:

"*Paramāgamam* here means the *Jināgama*. The modes in which the *uyir* "life" goes are of many kinds. The mode by which the soul of the *Siddha* goes is called *Avigraha gati*. For this the time is one; the mode by which the soul of a person of worldly life goes is called *vigraha gati*. This is of three kinds; the first is called *pāṇimuktā gati*; this has one bending/inflection (*vaḷaivu*) like the

letter "ta" (L) [cf.  inside the next picture]. The horizontal line represents the thumb and the vertical one represents the index finger. Hence the name *pāṇimuktā gati*. The time for this is 2; this is for the Devas and humans. The second one is called *llāngala gati*; this has got two bendings like the letter "pa" (U); the time for this is 3; this is for the animals; the third one is called *gōmūttira gati* [lit. like the form got after urination of a walking cow]. This has got three bendings []; the time for this is 4; this is for the *naraka-s*. This has been mentioned in the book called *Tattvārta sūttiram*.⁴



[Picture 5]

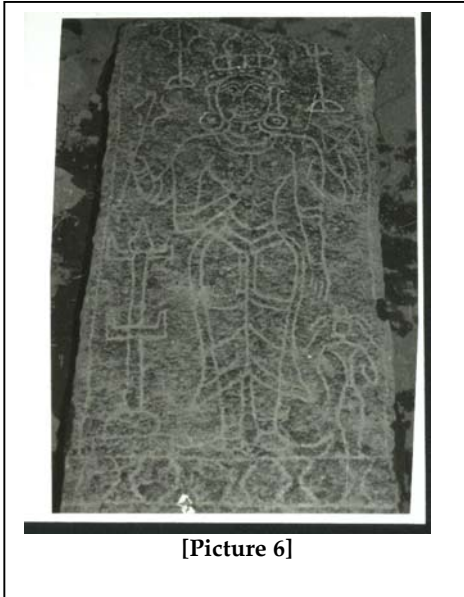
Thus the usage *kaippāṇi* should be referring to, most probably, the *pāṇi muktā gati* of the Jain *āgama-s* and probably refers also to the mode by which the soul of the learned Jain of *Kuppai* had left. It is quite interesting to notice a slab which is planted near this inscription depicts clearly this mode in bas relief (Picture 5) and next to it we find a line drawing showing a pole and a pot (hanging from it) suggesting that they were belonging to a monk. From this we can infer that the *Kuppai Pramāṇi* mentioned in the inscription may be a monk of the Jaina faith.

² Verse 948 *Cīvācācintāmaṇi*, ed., by Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer, Madras 1949.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

The inscription found on side II (given above) also contains mantras (first two lines). It also contains a compound noun viz., *pāṇi-t-tari*. *tari* means stone (slab) and *pāṇi* means "hand (mode)". Thus it may mean "the stone showing the hand mode". This usage also confirms the concept mentioned in side I as *Kaippāṇi*. The inscription on side II also states that this slab was planted after (the monk) following vow (or fasting) for twelve (days). This practise probably refers to the Jain custom of *sallekhana* "fasting unto death". Reading together both the inscriptions we may state that one *Kuppai Pramāṇi* fasted for twelve (days) following the Jain tradition of *sallekhana* and mortified himself and a stone showing the hand mode (of the outgoing soul) was planted in memory of this by the side of the inscription. Inscriptions mentioning *sallekhana* are found in Tamilnadu as well as in Karnataka. In fact various types of memorial stones (*niśidhikas*) are found in Sravana-belgola.⁵ But inscriptions and the symbol noticed in Kūvaṇūr are unique and found nowhere else so far.



[Picture 6]

There are two more slabs to be explained. One slab shows the figure of a female deity in standing posture (Picture 6). She has four hands. The upper arms carry a Trishul (trident) and a kettle drum. Of the front hands, the right one is lifted upwards (the palm is not clear) and the left one is hanging loosely. A two-tier oil lamp is found on her right side and on her left is found a person standing with his hair flowing on either side of his head. On the top two tridents are shown on either side of the figure.

By the side of this slab another slab is found (Picture 7). This contains inscriptions and symbols on both sides. Unfortunately it is broken at the bottom but luckily the two halves (Pictures 7l & 7u for one side and pictures 8l & 8u for the other side) were planted together.

⁵ *Inviting Death*, S. Settar, Institute of Indian Art History, Karnataka University, Dharwad, January 1986.



[Picture 7l]



[Picture 7u]

TextSide I

1. òm namo bhagava-
2. to sarva vinā
3. śani pādah hana-
4. paya paca yama =
5. ra = = = = rā = = = ru
6. = = = = ra = = = sa
7. ravvanda rām sarvva viṣa-
8. nāśini = hrām = hri-
9. m = hrōm = hraim =
10. hrōm hrōm [carandda]
11. phōm = scābha òm
12. krim òm krēm òm krim òm
13. mā u ū ma

halam ram	jkrau	mra [la] o
a		ām mā
a	hrim hrim hrim	ela
a a		ai
a		[o]

a

14. ni dēvi sarvva bhūta-
15. samhari svāha



Picture 8l



Picture 8u

Side II (Picture 8)

1. ॐ namo bhagavato
2. pāriśvadi tukarāyani
3. lakaṇḍi = nimalakṣi =
4. nākatuti = amrutavaru
5. ṣaṇi = śidda = ādē
6. śa = hara = para = hūmbhaṭ
7. phōham[sa :]
8. khimrai.....ṭhmrai
9. ku

pa sya.....sya
ñca

mrai ṣmrai [hrai]

syam syam syam

ॐ ram mri hrim jakrai

ṭai

tiran

tirunilakaṇṭim

ba : sa :

hram Sri

On the first glance, at the figure depicted in the slab (explained before) and these two inscriptions containing mantras and a few epithets like *bhagavato*, *nilakaṇḍi*, *nimalakṣi*, *nākatuti*, *aṃtavarṣiṇi*, *sarvavināsini* etc., people will identify these with Pārvati, the consort of Śiva (because of the Trishul and the kettle drum). It is not so. In all Tāntric traditions (whether it is Hindu, Jain or Buddhist) symbols like Trishul etc. are common. On interpreting these one has to keep in mind the other inscriptions found nearby these which are definitely Jain. When Yakshis and Yakshas were added to the *Tīrttaṅkaras* in the Jain tradition the worship of Yakshis for mundane benefits became very popular among Jain laity. It is interesting to note a Yakshi image planted along with a memorial stone of a monk who mortified himself at the lower hill

Sravanabelgola in Karnataka.⁶ Some of the epithets inscribed in these inscriptions are found in *Bhairava Padmāvāṭikalpa*, a famous Jaina work on Padmavathi Yakshi.⁷ Putting all these together we may say that since all of them are found in one and the same place they are related and that too to the Jain practices and customs. S. Settar, after analysing the monuments and inscriptions found at Sravanabelgola states that there are about seven ritual terms, which either individually or in combination with other terms, "indicate the same ritual method of terminating life. Nonetheless, each term, with a distinct shade of meaning, all its own, appears to have been intended to emphasize an aspect of the ritual process and its significance".⁸ These ritual terms are as follows:

1. *ārādhana*, with emphasis on knowledge of the texts
2. *pañcapada* with emphasis on the prayer of five phrases
3. *sanyasana* with emphasis on renunciation and abstinence
4. *sallekhana* with emphasis on fasting
5. *samādhi* with emphasis on meditation
6. *pañḍita* with emphasis on right knowledge
7. *pauggamaṇa* with emphasis on the process of mortification

Though all these cannot be explained in this small paper, the inscriptions described above do contain a ritual term like *paññirāṇṭu nōṛru*, "having fasted for twelve (days?). The epithet "*pramāṇi*" used in the first inscription refers to a person who has fluency in religious texts and thus pointing towards "the *ārādhana*" ritual. Here the text used for *ārādhana* may be the one on Padmāvathi Yakshi. Thus a learned Jain monk (because of the pot and pole symbol along with the hand mode symbol) fasted for twelve (days) while meditating on the text on a Yakshi, mortified himself through *sallekhana*. The people who have witnessed this have erected a *niśidika* "memorial stone" by not only inscribing this event on stone but also in a bas relief — the hand mode — by which the holy spirit has left the learned monk's body.

What is interesting here is that according to the Tāntric tradition the sacred mantras should not be uttered or written publicly. But here is a case when even as early as the 10th century A.D., a memorial stone along with the Yakshi figure and her proper (*bhīja*) mantras inscribed on stone was planted in an open place and shown publicly. This also shows us that Jain Tāntric practices were started as early as 10th century A.D. in Tamilnadu among Jains. Though these inscriptions do not have references to kings or their dates we may posit these to 10th century A.D., on paleographical grounds. Because the orthography followed in these slabs are very similar to those found in Parāntaka I's inscription (found near these group of inscribed slabs).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Comparative and critical study of mantra shastra (with special treatment of Jain mantravāda) being the introduction to Sri Bhairava Padmavati kalpa. Edited by Mohanlal Bhagwandhas Jhavery, Sarabhai Manilala Nawab, Ahmedabad, 1944.

⁸ Op. cit., p. 101.